United Nations A/62/PV.92

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

92nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 3 April 2008, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mr. De Palacio España (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as defined in the Millennium Declaration, are a permanent point of reference for Spanish development cooperation policy. Achieving those goals requires the joint effort of the international community.

For Spain, poverty eradication requires an increase in both the quantity and the quality of aid. We are committed to instruments and procedures that guarantee greater effectiveness, such as those embedded in the Paris Declaration, among which I would stress the following.

First is the progressive distribution of labour among donors on the basis of ownership by member countries of their own development processes.

Second is coordination between the traditional and emerging donors, as well as between governmental and non-governmental actors, including civil society and the private sector. In Spain, we try particularly to apply those principles nationally through an active commitment to and specialization in the involvement of our autonomous communities and cities in development issues.

Third is coherence in policies. Official development assistance (ODA) is only one element of public policy, and it does not help to rely on a commitment to a high-quality development aid if the remainder of public decisions — for example, in trade or debt — does not contribute, restricting opportunities for progress in the developing countries.

Fourth is commitment to active, selective and strategic multilateralism. The increase in Spanish contributions to the United Nations funds and programmes demonstrates that commitment, in particular the establishment of a Spain-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) fund for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the amount of $710 million. In its first months of operation, the fund is already showing a positive and promising balance, as members of the General Assembly are aware.

Millennium Development Goal 8, the most important in the current circumstances, calls for the creation of a global alliance for development. In that context, Spain is making a significant effort to increase its ODA and to seek innovative mechanisms of additional funding. Spanish ODA has doubled in percentage and tripled in quantity in the past three years, and will reach 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product in 2008, amounting to approximately $8 billion. We are also keeping our commitment, on the

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one hand, to allocate 20 per cent of ODA to the poorest countries — mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, which is becoming more important in our cooperation — and on the other, to contribute 20 per cent of ODA to basic social sectors. Furthermore, that increase in aid is being carried out without prejudice to our support for middle-income countries.

Building on that firm commitment to development, Spain would like to make some specific comments on our contribution to the actual goals discussed in this thematic debate.

First, with respect to the fight against hunger and poverty, without seeking to be exhaustive, I would underline the basic points of our commitment, such as funding for infrastructure; assistance to small enterprises; development of institutional capacities for the performance and allocation of markets; and special assistance to such organizations as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and funds such as UNICEF, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, as well as the World Food Programme (WFP).

The world food crisis, exacerbated by the price increase in basic products, is one of our main concerns. Thus, Spain has already taken action to respond to the emergency appeal made by WFP on 20 March, announcing a $47-million contribution for 2008.

With respect to MDG 2 on education, our priority is to support the development of elementary education through the strengthening of public educational systems. Together with our increasing bilateral cooperation and our support to UNICEF, UNESCO and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture, I would highlight the increase in Spain's contribution to the innovative Education for All Fast Track Initiative. In 2007, Spain contributed €45 million to the Initiative's catalyst fund — making us the third-largest donor — and for 2008, Spain foresees a contribution of €60 million, or approximately $90 million. Furthermore, we are working to focus increased attention on such special challenges as education in situations of conflict and emergency.

As time is pressing, and as the full text of my statement has been distributed, I will not dwell on MDGs 3, 4 and 6 on health. I wish to note, however, that all Spanish cooperation is inspired by an integrated concept of the Millennium Development Goals. We will not end poverty if we do not strengthen the education of the children of the world, which is the only way to improve their health and life expectancy. That holistic and transversal concept of development is the basis of the Spain-UNDP fund, with such horizontal thematic windows as "Children, food safety and nutrition" or "Youth, employment and migration", which are among the most important and were recently opened for a second round of projects.

In that spirit, our cooperation also incorporates other essential aspects of development, such as gender issues and environmental sustainability. In that regard, Spain works to place access to safe drinking water and sanitation at the centre of its efforts. An international exhibition on water and sustainable development will be inaugurated in June in Zaragoza, prioritizing water for development in all its dimensions, as a source of health and as a source for agricultural development in the world's poorest regions.

In conclusion, all of the aforementioned measures reflect Spain's contribution towards achieving the MDGs, but there remains a long way to go. We must take specific and effective measures and honour our commitments in a framework of joint responsibility, which is the basis for attaining the MDGs. In that regard, I wish to point out that Spain is keeping its promises and is ready to continue keeping them until 2015.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank the President of the General Assembly for his tireless efforts in the service of the States Members of the United Nations. I also congratulate him on his choice of topic for this thematic debate.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the heads of State and Government on 13 September 2000, reaffirmed their commitment to and belief in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations as fundamental to the achievement of peace, prosperity and justice throughout the world.

Since it gained its independence in 1971, the main objective of the Kingdom of Bahrain has been to open up and diversify its economy so that it is not overly and solely dependent on oil revenues. As a result, we have become an important financial centre in the Middle East and have expanded our petrochemical and aluminium industries. We also attach great importance to promoting and improving tourism and the living standards of our citizens and have focused on

the promotion and development of human resources as fundamental to the development of a society based on the principles of and respect for individual freedoms, human rights, equality and justice.

In order to implement the Millennium Development Goals, Bahrain has launched a phased policy in which it has taken basic steps to achieve reform and development through national plans, programmes, projects and strategies. In that regard, I should like to focus on three main areas, as part of this thematic debate: eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting education, and improving health and combating diseases.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger has become one of the main priorities of society. Indeed, poverty is a challenge that no society can avoid addressing; the culture and history of all societies require that they address it and reduce its effects. Bahrain is committed to its citizens and has dealt with this problem through many poverty reduction projects and programmes over the years. As a result, the percentage of our citizens who live on less than $1 a day now stands at zero; thus, none of our citizens suffer from hunger. Bahrain is also working to eliminate relative poverty. According to the most recent data, the average monthly income of a family of five is now 336 dinars, or approximately $1,000.

In Bahrain, joint efforts are being made by the public and private sectors to implement poverty reduction programmes and projects as a shared responsibility of society. One such project, launched in 1972, provides subsidies to 1,095 needy families with a total of 20,960 members as of 2005. Another, begun in 2000, provides needy families with water and electricity at reduced cost. As of December 2005, 9,020 families were benefiting from that project. Moreover, the Council of Ministers has adopted a national strategy to turn needy families into productive families with increased income, through the establishment of special centres where goods produced by needy families can be sold. An annual commemorative day, March 15, has been established to celebrate needy families' productivity. In addition, a grant for needy families was established in 2007 in the name of Sheikha Sabika bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of the King.

In accordance with article 9 of its constitution, Bahrain has established a public housing fund to assist low-income families. We also have a programme to assist in rebuilding dilapidated houses, which is implemented jointly by the Ministry of Works and Housing and various municipalities to help homeowners who do not qualify for other benefits. We are currently in the process of promulgating a new social security law to help vulnerable members of society who lack sufficient income, including divorcees, widows, the disabled, prisoners' families, the elderly and those who are unable to work because of disease.

With regard to the second objective, promoting primary education, Bahrain has been a pioneer in the area of education and continues to develop new programmes and projects to promote and develop the educational sector and improve its quality. Our accomplishments in this area include the following. The literacy rate for those aged 15 to 24 is 97 per cent, and 100 per cent of our pupils complete the fifth grade. In addition, the State has initiated projects to improve the educational environment and to promote the teaching of mathematics, sciences, English and subjects related to information technology, environment, communications, services and human rights. The King Hamad Schools of the Future Project enables students to interact with their teachers and to benefit from new technologies and research, which enables them to make use of new electronics. Committees have been established to study the development and promotion of primary and secondary schools, and industrial education is being promoted through new training and engineering programmes and technical establishments. New centres have been established to promote and develop all levels of education, including a centre for the training of kindergarten teachers and a centre for vocational and technical training. In support of education, our Prime Minister has established an annual grant for outstanding schools.

With regard to health, the Kingdom of Bahrain has made efforts in the area of children's health care. In 2005, as a result, the infant mortality rate fell to 8.9 per 1,000 live births and the under-five mortality rate stood at 10.9 per 1,000 live births. Vaccinations against the measles were 100 per cent in 2005 compared to 95 per cent in 1995. We also have a variety of other programmes devoted to children's health and care.

The State has also undertaken activities to improve maternal health through the promotion of prenatal and post-partum health-care programmes. We also sponsor programmes to promote cultural awareness in our campaign to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. A national committee on HIV/AIDS has been established to complement the ministerial committee on HIV/AIDS incorporating the Ministry of Health and others. The committee strives tirelessly to combat that scourge and to promote medical and health awareness.

With respect to the campaign against malaria and tuberculosis, we have not found a single case of malaria in Bahrain since 1980, while registered cases of tuberculosis numbered 23.6 per 100,000 population in 2005. The mortality rate for tuberculosis consequently fell from 1.6 to 0.8 in 2005.

In conclusion, I express our hope that all the MDGs will be achieved by 2015 and that Member States will thereby create a world of security and stability for all.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): My delegation congratulates President Kerim on his efficient, effective and proactive stewardship of the General Assembly. We are indeed very pleased to have him guide our deliberations. In particular, we commend him for convening this debate under the rubric "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015".

It is admittedly a source of pain and anger that, on each of the issues being explored in this debate — poverty and hunger, education and health care — we are still lagging behind when measured against the Goals, and that Africa appears to have made the least headway towards ameliorating its conditions. There have been exceptions, of course, as the background paper notes, especially in the area of food security and particularly in Africa, which appears to have achieved numerous successes.

However, as the paper further notes and explains, those successes have not led to a sustained reduction in the rates of hunger and poverty on the continent. Progress has also been hampered by the failure to recognize and address all the multidimensional causes and effects of poverty.

Perhaps the most basic of all needs is that for food. Here, the situation in Africa and much of the poor world is increasingly dire. As a result, chronic hunger, environmental degradation and the large-scale exodus of desperate populations are in evidence, with the risks of pandemic diseases and conflict.

Of particular note is the spreading havoc following in the wake of soaring oil prices. That will be increasingly felt in accumulating the capital necessary to sustain the process of development, which will presumably stagnate, if not decline. Oil price increases have even affected the level and amounts of food flows, now at their lowest since 1973, and most food aid is now provided on an emergency basis. When viewed alongside the mounting effects of declining food aid, the growing impact of climate change is also daunting. From the expansion of arid lands, the increased risk of droughts and floods in response to changing weather patterns, along with other developments, in all likelihood Africa will suffer a decline in food production of at least 20 per cent.

Progress towards Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 — to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger — is surely behind in projections for many developing countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. While the mobilization of domestic resources is key to attaining MDG 1, we must not lose sight of the need for developed countries to eliminate their unfair agricultural subsidies and practices, which often reach more than three times the level of their official development assistance.

While there has been a significant increase in primary school enrolment in Africa, the greatest challenge remains with regard to MDG 2 on achieving universal primary education. Far too many children remain out of school and the dropout rate is staggering. Additionally, the need for competent, trained teachers remains high. Finally, children must not only learn and be taught; they must be fit to learn, fed, healthy, clothed, protected and encouraged.

With regard to MDG 5, the overall picture for improving health seems disjointed, conflicting and often counterproductive. In that regard, it is important to point out the emergence of new partners seeking to finance the health needs of developing countries. Foundations — and here we must always mention the

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; global funds, such as the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and targeted bilateral programmes, such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, are all having a notable impact.

In looking at the MDGs as a whole and the target date set for their achievement, one senses that they are in fact part of a larger phenomenon. Donor financing commitments for health and other goals remain far ahead of actual aid flows. Add to that the unpredictability of external financing, and the difficulty in planning and increasing health services becomes more understandable. As the background paper notes, there is certainly a need to develop mechanisms to hold all partners accountable for their performance against international commitments. It is crucial to address the plight of severely underperforming countries, especially fragile and failed States whose populations are at risk of serious dislocations and social breakdown.

Finally, my country has embarked on a series of programmes designed to improve national capacity, including hunger mitigation; educational and health-care infrastructures; tackling chronic power, water and housing shortages; enhancing and strengthening our communications and rail and road links; and refurbishing our key asset — the port — including the development of a major modern harbour.

Thanks primarily to the commitments of our enlightened leadership, to the efforts of our own people and to the vigorous and encouraging support of our partners. We are making some progress towards meeting the MDGs. We owe it to our own people to confront development challenges with courage and a measure of optimism and confidence.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the President on having taken the initiative to convene this important meeting. Undoubtedly, the constructive debate in which we were engaged yesterday was an additional opportunity to promote solidarity and partnership within the international community and confirm its determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly that of halving poverty by 2015.

Allow me at the outset to stress that the State of Qatar is a committed and dedicated partner, which supports international efforts for development, particularly those geared towards fighting poverty and fairly and equitably distributing the fruits of global growth. The people and State of Qatar support the efforts of developing countries to achieve sustainable development and to respond quickly to humanitarian relief and needs of all. This is based on our belief in international partnership as a vehicle for supporting the efforts of developing countries to attain the MDGs, particularly Goal 1.

The State of Qatar has been on track in implementing the MDGs. With regard to Goal 1, the State of Qatar has undertaken development projects and programmes in rural and urban areas in order to guarantee full and productive employment for its citizens. All of our citizens therefore earn high wages, which allows them to live in dignity and combat poverty. We have also been on track on implementing Goals 2 through 7 within the prescribed time frame.

At the national level, two days ago, the State of Qatar adopted the general national budget for 2008-2009, 21 per cent of which was allocated to education. Health and social services received 9.6 per cent of the total national budget. Those allocations prove Qatar's determination and commitment to achieving sustainable and comprehensive development.

The State of Qatar was honoured to host the fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in 2001, which resulted in the Doha Development Round. Negotiations in the Doha Round are still under way. Qatar was also honoured to host the second South Summit in 2005, in which His Royal Highness, the Emir of Qatar, submitted many initiatives that were entirely designed to galvanize the international partnership for development.

During the 2005 Millennium Summit in New York, His Royal Highness launched a number of initiatives, most prominent among which was Qatar's initiative to host the Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. Preparations are under way for that conference, which is scheduled to convene in Doha from 29 November to 3 December 2008. Qatar also generously and systematically provided relief and bilateral assistance in response to disasters and emergencies beyond its contributions to various United Nations funds and programmes.

We meet today to assess achievements, address challenges, get back on track to achieve the MDGs and forge international partnerships to attain them. In that regard, we recall the report issued by the Department of Public Information in June 2007, in which we were regrettably reminded that despite some progress registered at midpoint in many countries around the globe and in some African countries, sub-Saharan African countries are still lagging behind in realizing the MDGs that called for halving extreme poverty by 2015. The report reminded us that despite a reduction in the proportion of people who live on less than $1 a day to 41.1 per cent — down from 45.9 per cent in 1999 — achieving that goal by 2015 will require at least doubling this rate.

Furthermore, 30 per cent of children in sub-Saharan African countries are still without access to education, and mortality rates among children under five years of age is double the corresponding rate in developing countries. Two thirds of the women in those countries still earn their wages working in non-agricultural sectors. Mortality rates from HIV/AIDS are still on the increase and have reached 2 million last year. Only 42 per cent of city dwellers have access to clean water, and 63 per cent of the populations of sub-Saharan Africa have no access to sanitation.

The African continent registered a 6 per cent economic growth rate and has witnessed the emergence of some promising trends, but that progress remains meagre, given that it is largely attributable to the boom in basic commodity prices. However, international aid to major sub-Saharan African countries has remained largely unchanged since 2004, with the exception of partial debt forgiveness and occasional humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations believes that the donor community must act faster if it is serious about honouring the commitment it undertook in 2005 to double aid to Africa by 2010. The Organization also called for expediting international trade negotiations in the context of the Doha Round and for establishing rules in foreign trade that are more just.

Globalization poses challenges and opens up opportunities. Yet we must admit that its fruits are not shared by the overwhelming majority of developing countries. That is particularly true for Africa and the least developed countries. Therefore, debt cancellation and development assistance will be extremely important in jumpstarting the growth of the economies of the least developed countries and marginalized economies.

The goal of alleviating poverty can best be reached by activating international partnerships to assist developing countries in implementing programmes and projects aimed at providing full employment and decent paid work opportunities for all, in urban and rural areas alike. During the 2005 World Summit, world leaders expressed support for fair globalization and the twin objectives of full and productive employment and providing decent work opportunities for all. The 2006 ministerial declaration of the Economic and Social Council stressed the importance of full, productive and decent employment for all as both the objective of the MDGs and the means to achieving them, including the Goal of poverty eradication. Furthermore, in his annual report to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, the Secretary-General proposed to officially include full employment and creation of decent work for all as a new objective in the context of MDG 1.

Mr. Bin Hassan (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to express our deep appreciation and thanks to the President for convening this thematic debate. We are confident that under his wise leadership our work will meet with success. We are also confident that we will be able to identify the challenges and difficulties that hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the required measures to be taken within the determined time frame.

I would like to associate my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and of Bangladesh on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the least developed countries (LDCs), respectively.

The Republic of Yemen has undertaken several economic, financial and administrative reforms since the middle of 1995 in cooperation with its regional and international partners. It has laid focus on the MDGs by integrating them into its development policies and its five-year development plan for the period from 2006 to 2011.

We have emphasized the importance of combating poverty by prioritizing investment programmes and small and medium-sized projects as

well as by conducting a review of our economic and financial legislation and laws. We have also tried to reinvigorate our social security network and empower human resources, especially for poor sections of the population, in order to increase their participation and production.

In this connection, the Government of Yemen has set up mechanisms for good governance, which include an important body to combat corruption and another for bids and procurement.

In short, we have three long-term strategic goals for furthering our development: first, advancing the country from low-income to high income, in terms of human development, secondly, achieving high economic growth, and thirdly, reducing poverty by 50 per cent vis-à-vis 1998 levels.

We have been faced with many challenges and difficulties that have hindered the achievement of the MDGs, including the grave demographic problem, the worsening of environmental and financial difficulties, the development of human resources and the limited financial capabilities of the national economy.

Per capita, official development assistance (ODA) is still low, standing at $13 per annum, whereas the international level of per capita ODA for LDCs stands at $33 per annum. Worldwide price increases for food staples that we have all witnessed of late will be detrimental to the efforts of developing countries to combat poverty and to achieve the MDGs. We stress the importance of ODA for supporting the limited national budgets of LDCs. National strategies, in this regard, should be the appropriate framework for cooperation and development partnerships.

Currently, however, the level of ODA for LDCs remains beneath the required level, standing at 0.08 per cent of gross national product (GNP) of donor countries. We emphasize the importance of honouring commitments undertaken by international development partners to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GNP to development in developing countries, in addition to allocating 20 per cent of ODA to LDCs by 2010. We believe it is crucial that the distribution of ODA be both fair and equitable for all receiving countries.

The problem of external debt constitutes a great hindrance that restricts our development efforts and national strategies. It is important that further alleviation of debts be considered in order to include all least developed countries. It is also crucial that debt alleviation not serve as a substitute for other financing sources.

Undoubtedly, mechanisms should be established for the monitoring and follow-up of the fulfilling of the commitments undertaken at international conferences. We look forward to the follow-up of the Monterrey Consensus that will take place this year in Doha. We hope that a consensus will be reached on a new monitoring mechanism for putting into action the commitments of the Monterrey Consensus.

Mr. Staur (Denmark): Denmark welcomes this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is urgent to make 2008 a year of action on the MDGs. We need to do more and we need to do it faster. The key question then is, of course, what can be done quickly and with significant impact? Where do we need to focus when addressing the issue of scaling-up in order to achieve the MDGs?

In our view, one issue that can be addressed quickly and effectively — and which at the same time has great potential for scaling-up and therefore should be of crucial importance in this regard — is the economic empowerment of women.

Gender equality is a basic human right. But it is also smart economics and one of the most important driving forces of economic growth. It is also a key factor in the fight against poverty. Providing women equal opportunities to educate themselves and actively participate in productive economic activity on equal terms with men is imperative in order to achieve the MDGs.

If our generation is to ensure that each woman has the chance to develop her potential, we must ensure the establishment of a level playing field that increases women's economic opportunities. That also means increased access to business opportunities, access to land and resources and access to credit and essential infrastructure.

The task is tremendous, but we must at the same time also focus on the women of tomorrow. We must ensure that girls get the opportunity not only to be enrolled in primary school, but also to complete their full education. They should be given the means to plan their own future and to make their own choices.

However, political commitment to gender equality and to the empowerment of women takes more

than words. It takes concrete actions and priority of resources. A recent World Bank report clearly states that a substantial resource gap exists. If we are to achieve MDG 3 on gender equality, it is estimated that a doubling of resources is needed.

At the same time, investment in gender equality pays off and therefore should be a national priority primarily financed by domestic resources in each country, but increased official development assistance targeted at women is, of course, also essential, and Denmark has committed to doubling its assistance focused on gender equality over a three-year time frame from 2008 through 2010.

The Danish Government has initiated a MDG 3 call to action. One could argue that a special MDG 3 call should not be needed. Gender equality is far too often treated as a so-called cross-cutting issue. It sounds very nice, but in reality a cross-cutting issue all too often means that no deeds follow the words. Rather, the empowerment of women should be at centre stage as the goal in itself that it rightly is in the form of MDG 3. Without empowered women, the MDGs will not become a reality in Africa and we will therefore have failed in our common responsibility.

To ensure that MDG 3 is kept at the forefront of development efforts at all levels and by all actors, we propose a global coalition of Governments, international organizations, private sector actors and civil society that are all committed to making gender equality and women's economic empowerment a key issue. We need to have that coalition established in the run-up to the United Nations high-level meeting on 25 September, and we need to maintain its operation all the way to 2015.

That global coalition on MDG 3 should strive to guarantee the needed leadership and, among other things, work for three things: first, a substantial increase in resources to gender equality and the empowerment of women; secondly, strengthened accountability in relation to MDG 3 efforts at both the international and national levels; and thirdly, a strong and active involvement by the private sector.

On 17 April, in two weeks' time, Denmark will host a conference in Copenhagen on the empowerment of women. The ambition is to establish a catalogue of tangible and replicable interventions and commitments with a focus on how to create economic options for women that put poverty reduction on a faster track.

Denmark also sees the United Nations high-level meeting on 25 September as an important opportunity to send a strong signal of true commitment to the empowerment of women across the world. It is time to act. We have clearly demonstrated that it pays to invest in women. It is an investment in not only one, but in all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Muburi-Muita (Kenya): I take this opportunity to express appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for the background papers on the three MDG issues under focus during this discussion: poverty and hunger, education and health.

Kenya associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and Cape Verde on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the African Group, respectively.

Kenya, like many other developing countries, recognizes that the MDGs offer a great opportunity to address human welfare in the world. The adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs in 2000 was a laudable initiative of the international community to fight poverty, accelerate human development and facilitate the gradual but more effective integration of the developing world, especially Africa, into the global economy. The reaffirmation of the MDGs in subsequent international conferences was an additional indication of the commitment of the international community to address poverty and inequality and to end the marginalization and exclusion of the poor and disadvantaged.

In Africa, the challenges of eradicating poverty, achieving rapid and sustainable socio-economic development and integrating the continent into the mainstream of the world economy have increasingly been taken seriously by the African leadership, as evidenced by some recent important development policy initiatives. Those include the transformation of the Organization of African Unity to the African Union and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development as the strategic programme to bolster Africa's efforts towards meeting the MDGs, among other things.

In recognition of the special needs of Africa, the Millennium Declaration called upon the international community to support the consolidation of peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development. The

continent's development partners were called on specifically, inter alia, to take special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development on the continent, including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced official development assistance, increased flow of foreign direct investment, and the transfer of technology. Africa was also to be assisted to build capacity to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Indeed, that recognition and commitment of the international community to the special development needs of Africa, coupled with Africa's own initiatives in that direction, raised hopes of achieving the MDGs on the continent by 2015.

However, in spite of those initial high expectations, the latest reports generally affirm that Africa has not made sufficient progress towards meeting the MDGs by the target date. That most countries in Africa are far off track to achieve most if not all of the goals is now a forgone conclusion.

To reflect on Kenya's MDGs situation, may I start by informing the General Assembly that some uneven progress has been made. During the final two decades of the last century, my country's economy experienced declining economic growth rates, reaching its worst in 2002 at just above zero per cent of real gross domestic product (GDP) growth. That depressed economic situation had spill-over effects on other sectors; hence, the bad performance of MDG indicators, including declines in access to safe drinking water and sanitation, child nutrition and health services, increased pressure on environmental goods and services, and a large number of people living below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption.

The situation began improving five years ago due to efforts by the Government to resuscitate the economy through the Economic Recovery Strategy of 2003. The implementation of that policy has enabled the economy to grow from a GDP of 0.5 per cent in 2002 to one of about 6 per cent in 2006 and an estimated 7 per cent last year. Those gains have impacted positively on MDG indicators across the economy. For instance, the percentage of Kenyans living in absolute poverty fell by 10 per cent between 2002 and 2006. As a result of the introduction of free primary education in 2003, the national gross enrolment rate in primary schools rose from 93 per cent to just over 100 per cent.

Kenya has long implemented development programmes that focused on the MDGs. As a result, the adoption of MDG-based planning in response to the Millennium Declaration served to sharpen the focus and also to rally all stakeholders behind the MDGs. Since the launch of the MDG-based planning in 2004, several milestones have been realized. Those include a cabinet directive in March 2005 requiring all ministries and sectors to mainstream MDGs in their specific policies, plans and budgets. That led to increased budgetary allocations for MDG-related programmes; further, MDGs have become key criteria for allocating resources for development. Education, health and agriculture have been the greatest beneficiaries of that directive.

A national MDGs needs assessment study was undertaken in 2005, and it indicated that a total of nearly $6 billion would be needed annually to implement the MDGs. Since that time, this report has continued to inform the planning and budgeting process in Kenya.

The Millennium Villages concept has been introduced, leading to the establishment of two such villages, while nine districts have been declared Millennium Districts. The two Villages and the nine Districts are being set up as models for best practices that can help achieve the MDGs in the country. There have also been district MDG capacity-building exercises to entrench MDG-based planning at the district level and to identify quick-win projects for implementation.

Finally, the Government's efforts to address the MDGs have been faced with a number of challenges, which have included inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, inadequate capacity and weak policy frameworks. It is in that respect that the international community is called upon to review and meet its commitments — particularly in the areas of resource provision, technology transfer and capacity-building — to fast-track the implementation and achievement of the MDGs by the target date. For its part, the Government has prepared the Vision 2030 plan of action to replace our economic recovery strategy as the blueprint for economic development. Vision 2030 has been prepared to embrace the MDGs and will be implemented through five-year medium-term strategies that the Government has begun to develop.

Let me point out that achievement of the MDGs requires that the assumptions behind the MDG agenda hold at all times. Thus, achieving the MDGs requires the implementation of commitments by all stakeholders. All parties must live up to the challenge bestowed upon them by the Millennium Declaration. If that is done, regardless of how far off track countries are, there will still be hope. With adequate donor support and MDG-friendly policies in the recipient countries, we can all be optimistic about these goals.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's meeting to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the result of the awareness of Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, concerning the dangers that could arise from delays in their achievement. In that connection, we should like to commend Mr. Kerim and to express our appreciation for the Secretary-General's observation that 2008 should be a year for addressing the needs of the poorest and least developed countries.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We believe that it is still possible to achieve the MDGs by 2015 if the members of the international community are mobilized to that end and if all stakeholders fulfil their commitments towards eliminating poverty and hunger. Nevertheless, we are aware that we face myriad challenges as a result of the negative impact of globalization on developing countries, the effects of climate change and the widening gap between rich and poor within many countries.

Since 2000, Lebanon has worked hard to implement the MDGs. Our efforts have produced many successes, the most important of which is the fact that the number of those living under the poverty line fell from 27 per cent in 1995 to 20.6 per cent in 2000. In addition, the number of students completing their primary-school education rose from 95.3 per cent in 2001-2002 to 96.3 per cent in 2006. Illiteracy among women has also declined, and the percentage of girls enrolled in primary schools has increased, with the percentage of girls enrolled in secondary schools reaching 79 per cent in 2002. However, a sufficient number of women are still not participating in political decision-making: no more than six women were elected to parliament in the last elections. That is why the National Commission for Electoral Law Reform, established by the Council of Ministers in 2005, proposed a quota for women candidates to ensure that every ballot includes women.

In accordance with the MDGs, Lebanon has reduced its child and infant mortality rates. With regard to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other deadly diseases, the number of those living with HIV had been reduced to 15 per 100,000 in 2007, and the number of tuberculosis cases to 9 per 100,000.

Finally, as of the beginning of the second quarter of 2006, Lebanon had achieved remarkable accomplishments in the area of environmental sustainability, as verified by environmental indicators, ranking thirty-sixth among more than 133 countries.

However, the destructive war waged by Israel against Lebanon in the summer of 2006 was devastating both to the environment and to sustainable social and economic development in our country, putting an end to nearly all our efforts in those areas. With regard to the war's ecological effects, it must be recalled that, on 13 and 15 July 2006, Israeli aircraft intentionally struck Lebanese fuel plants. This resulted in the worst environmental disaster in the eastern Mediterranean, with the spread of an oil slick along 150 kilometres of Lebanon's coast.

Lebanon is aware that public debt poses a major problem for its national economy. We continue to endeavour to reduce our budget deficit, which is due mainly to debt servicing. Lebanon managed to reduce the level of debt servicing from 18 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000 to 13 per cent of GDP in 2006. We have also begun to promulgate laws aimed at attracting foreign investment and promoting economic growth. Furthermore, the Lebanese Government succeeded in securing $7.6 billion in international financial assistance at the donor conference held in January 2007 in Paris. We believe that the Lebanese crisis has also had very negative effects on our economic growth, which stood at 1.7 per cent during 2007 and is expected to fall this year if the crisis continues. That is why we emphasize the need to hold presidential elections and implement the Arab initiative in that connection.

Developing countries are called upon to implement needed structural reforms, build their institutional capacities, devise development strategies that can create decent employment opportunities,

achieve economic growth and put an end to extreme poverty.

The developed countries are called upon to help in that effort through appropriate financial and technological assistance to developing countries' economies and to promote international partnerships, which are essential for the achievements of the MDGs. The cornerstone of the international partnership for development is the political will of the developed countries to honour their commitments so that those commitments do not remain mere hopes and wishes of the poor of the world, mirages that recede ever further on the horizon, condemning them to continued poverty and alienation.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Benin, like previous speakers, would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his excellent initiative, which we believe will enable us to promote the international community's heightened awareness of and support for the ideals of peace, justice, equality among peoples and sustainable development for all countries.

As a least developed country and a party to the Millennium Declaration, Benin has committed itself to implementing significant policies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries. Benin also aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the African Group.

Faced with inadequate financial resources and suffering from a downward trend in the price of commodities, particularly cotton, which results from unfair international trading practices and the difficulty of accessing international markets, Benin has adopted several development policies and strategies with a view to creating a favourable environment for achieving the MDGs.

By way of example, I would like to refer to the most important documents. Benin 2025: ALAFIA is a planning and analysis document for long-term development strategies covering a period of 25 years. The Strategic Development Guidelines for Benin for 2006 to 2011, a Government document based on the aforementioned document, takes into account the MDGs and the commitments that are contained in the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction for 2007 to 2009 has a mainly socio-economic character and will help to implement the second document — and, by extension, the first — over a period of three years.

The measures taken by the Government of Benin since the adoption of the MDGs are reflected in considerable progress in many areas and, at the same time, in very modest progress in other areas. Indeed, an analysis of the results of the strategies that have been implemented over the first five-year period of 2000 to 2005 for achieving the MDGs has shown that, despite some progress, all the targets have not yet been achieved. Thus, poverty persists and is even worsening. Given current trends, the achievement of the MDGs is very much in question.

One of the actions that has resulted from that assessment has been the drawing up of a second-generation poverty reduction strategy, which has allowed us to assess what needs to be done to achieve the MDGs in eight sectors: education; health; water; sanitation; energy; transport; roads; and gender. That shows the determination of the Government of Benin to ensure that the MDGs become a reality by 2015.

However, we should stress that the introduction of the use of statistics in macroeconomic planning for the strategy for 2007 to 2009 has revealed a significant funding gap that must be bridged, both for the period of the implementation of that plan and during the follow-up period.

This is the appropriate time and place to repeat my Government's thanks to the international community for the efforts that it has continued to make to promote democracy and governance and to improve the living conditions of people in the urban and rural areas of Benin. Despite those praiseworthy efforts, we hope that significant progress will be made to ensure that we are able to complete all our activities to overcome poverty.

The size of the budgetary deficit relating to assessed needs suggests that tough measures must be taken to heighten mobilization and ensure better use of financial resources. For that reason, the international

community must substantially increase official development assistance to my country. In that context, the reference point for any development assistance for Benin by the agencies of the United Nations system or by any other technical and financial partner must be the Strategic Development Guidelines for Benin for 2006 to 2011.

For its part, Benin is committed to continue, together with the private sector and civil society, to improve our national macroeconomic framework and to improve mobilization of the necessary resources for achieving the goals that have been set. We will base our work on the principle of mutual commitment between donor countries, including the multilateral institutions, and developing countries, a principle which is set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, in order to increase the effectiveness of official development assistance.

Finally, Benin's membership in regional and subregional bodies represents a major benefit, which will allow it to draw up and implement integrated regional development policies.

Following the statements that were made by the panellists invited by the President of the General Assembly to consider this important issue that we are dealing with this morning, I would like to close by appealing to the Bretton Woods institutions and to all development partners, in both the public and the private sectors, to provide the necessary resources or to increase those resources within the framework of the agreed international commitments regarding financing for development. I thank them all for their commitment. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Jeffrey Sachs for his personal commitment to the poor and the disadvantaged, who are the main focus of the MDGs.

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): I thank the President of the General Assembly for hosting this thematic debate. I also thank those participating in the stimulating panel discussions earlier this week.

New Zealand fully endorses the statement made by the representative of the Kingdom of Tonga on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are one of the global pathways to a better future. For the first time in history, there is an international consensus to close the poverty gap. Poverty on the scale we know it today, and in a world that has the capability of reducing it dramatically, is a moral offence. It has a huge opportunity cost on societies and on the global community through the productivity and the creativity that are forgone. Working to eliminate poverty and to remove inequalities addresses fundamental rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in related treaties. Finding pathways to do that is a global, regional and national challenge.

At this halfway point, the development challenge has never been higher on the international agenda. New Zealand recently signed up to the MDG Call to Action, and we look forward to participating in the Secretary-General's high-level event on MDGs, scheduled to take place on 25 September.

We have heard throughout this week's debate about some success stories, but while good achievements have been made, there are troubling signs that the global community has not made sufficient progress with the MDGs. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific are two subregions that are most off track. The stakes are high, especially for the millions of people trapped in the cycle of extreme poverty, dying of hunger and tropical diseases, and the millions that lack access to basic education. We can and we must do better. That requires a truly global effort across a range of issues that the panellists raised earlier this week, including peace and security, governance, economic growth, trade and investment, particularly in the agricultural sector, and development assistance.

My delegation wishes to focus on MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. New Zealand stresses the importance of MDG 3 for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals. Gender inequality and poverty are inextricably linked, but continue to be among the most persistent and pervasive global challenges. It is critical that Governments recognize the negative impact and the opportunity costs of gender inequality and that we step up the pace to achieve positive development outcomes, particularly at the country level.

Girls' access to education has undoubtedly increased as a result of the impetus provided by MDG 3, but not fast enough in some countries and regions. Progress has been especially uneven in the Pacific, which faces a particular challenge in achieving gender equality in education. Significantly less global attention has been directed towards supporting the

other MDG 3 indicators relating to the elimination of gender disparity in non-agricultural employment and in parliamentary representation.

New Zealand recognizes that sexual and reproductive health rights, including those related to HIV and AIDS, are also crucial for the achievement of the MDGs. Access to services, safe motherhood, prevention efforts and the treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and the elimination of gender violence would improve the lives of many people in the Pacific, and would also improve economic and social development.

The United Nations system has a critical role to play in advancing MDG 3, and New Zealand therefore attaches particular importance to working for a strengthened, coherent and adequately resourced United Nations gender architecture. There is an urgent need to revitalize the commitment and responsibility of the entire United Nations system to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Let me now turn to health and basic education. New Zealand contributes about 10 per cent of its total official development assistance (ODA) budget to health programmes and 20 per cent of its total ODA budget to education programmes. We prioritize support to basic education for the achievement of universal primary education and equal access at every level. Our support for health is guided by primary health-care principles as the most cost-effective and equitable way to improve health status and eliminate poverty.

New Zealand acknowledges that no gains will be made with respect to poverty and hunger, education, health, gender parity or any of the other MDGs without strong global partnerships. Partnerships and alignment, expressed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, allow us to combine New Zealand's support with others' larger contributions. At the same time, greater coordination among development partners can help to achieve the MDGs. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that attention to gender equality and women's empowerment remains central to those efforts.

Mr. Kaludjerović (Montenegro): At the outset, let me congratulate the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Kerim, for organizing this important and timely debate. Montenegro aligns itself with the statement made yesterday by the Minister of Growth of the Republic of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union (EU).

I would like to focus on the Montenegrin perspective on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to add some remarks relevant to our views on poverty-, health- and education-related goals.

At the midpoint between the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and 2015, some parts of the world remain off track to achieve the MDGs. As we all agree, significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Declaration, but some areas still need a significant scale-up of investment and coordinated action at the national and international levels in order to achieve the set goals.

The achievement of all eight MDGs is closely interlinked. Investment in one MDG has a significant impact on the achievement of the other Goals and is further linked to the overall economic and social development of a country.

Since regaining its independence, Montenegro has undergone numerous reform processes and adopted several strategic documents that define its overall development path towards EU integration and represent significant tools for the full achievement of MDGs. The most important documents are the development and poverty reduction strategy, the agenda of economic reforms, the national action plan for children, the national strategy for sustainable development, and numerous other strategies, laws and action plans.

As a result of sound economic policies, Montenegro has achieved macroeconomic stability, while the prospect of economic growth remains strong. Also, comprehensive activities are being conducted to strengthen the rule of law and good governance as main preconditions for the creation of an enabling environment for the full implementation of the MDGs.

Poverty has a broad definition that goes beyond the realm of economy and affects people's lives on multiple other levels, including access to social services, health, education, access to the labour market, gender equality and so on. Empirical data for Montenegro show that significant progress has been made, and recent analysis indicates that the percentage of people living below the absolute poverty line is relatively small at 10.9 per cent, while at the regional and local levels the value varies from 8.4 per cent to

13.6 per cent. It is also important to note that the unemployment rate dropped to 11.8 per cent this year. However, one third of the population is still considered to be economically vulnerable.

A recent increase in income levels and vigorous economic activity in Montenegro are expected to lead to a proportional reduction in poverty and relative poverty, but despite favourable economic conditions and pro-poor economic and social policy, some challenges remain. Regional distribution of poverty is uneven, and particular efforts need to be made to improve the situation of vulnerable groups.

The comprehensive reform of the educational sector has been ongoing since 2000, and Montenegro has adopted a wide range of education legislation. The Montenegrin Government has recognized the significance of education for the sustainable economic and social development of the country. Quantitative indicators show that reform implementation has yielded positive results and that the education-related MDGs are achievable.

Nevertheless, despite favourable trends, there are certain issues that still need to be addressed. The most significant improvements in that regard are connected with the quality of education itself and the level to which required skills in the educational system reflect the needs of the labour market.

The Millennium Declaration attaches great importance to health, and I am pleased to state that Montenegro is on track to achieve related targets. For example, reports on the vaccination and immunization of children are positive, ranging between 92 and 98 per cent depending on the immunization group, and the proportion of births attended by a skilled health professional is at 100 per cent.

However, because of the political, social and economic situation in the 1990s, a reduction in the quality of health services was evident, leading the Government to introduce broad health sector reforms. Primary health care is being strengthened at the local levels to ensure quality access, especially with respect to vulnerable population groups; proper care for all children, but particularly for children with special needs; and the increased effectiveness and efficiency of health care.

In respect to Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, Montenegro regards combating HIV/AIDS as a priority due to the increase in risk-associated behaviour among young people. Because of the strong need for coordinated action to prevent the spread of the disease, the Montenegrin Government has founded the National HIV/AIDS Commission, which cooperates closely with governmental and non-governmental actors, international organizations and the donor community.

The concentrated efforts of the international community and national institutions are required in order to achieve the MDGs globally and at the national level. Aid quality can be improved, as can donor coordination. Furthermore, the achievement of the MDGs will not be possible without sound partnerships among the public sector, the private sector and civil society. The support of the United Nations system and its coordination are also of the utmost importance.

In conclusion, Montenegro is committed to the full achievement of the MDGs by focusing on the strengthening of institutions and the implementation of the overall set of economic and social reforms that emphasize accelerated, sustainable and inclusive growth. Enhanced efforts at all levels, national and global, are indispensable if the MDGs are to be achieved by 2015.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): First of all, allow me to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for convening this important and timely debate.

Croatia has aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, but allow me to make a couple of additional remarks on this issue, to which my Government attaches a great importance.

We have gathered today to exchange views on the achievements and challenges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but let us not forget that the acronym "MDG" hides the Goals that were agreed by all the world's countries and by all the world's leading development institutions. The crucial question is: Can we, the world's representatives gathered in the General Assembly, be satisfied with our achievements? As has already been stated yesterday and today, the answer is: only partially.

Have we halved extreme poverty? Have we provided universal primary education? Have we reduced child mortality and improved maternal health?

Encouraging answers to those questions have been registered throughout the world, but on an uneven basis. Although parts of Africa have attained good results in achieving food security for their people, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia suffer from the lowest rates of progress, and there has not been a sustainable reduction in the rates of poverty and hunger. We have to ask ourselves: Have we done enough?

In order to achieve the MDGs not only in Africa but throughout the world, official development assistance must be strengthened. However, developing countries also need to ensure that those commitments are reflected in each key national development and poverty reduction policy and that the multidimensional causes and effects of poverty are being equally addressed.

We do understand that agriculture and infrastructure are the keys for economic development and that a country lacking the means of developing those, combined with a burden of debt, cannot be expected to move anywhere. Without forgetting the overall development agenda, and striving to promote equitable and efficient distribution systems, the international community has to put the focus back on improving access to agricultural land and resources for people living in poverty, since it is their essential tool for survival.

Croatia attaches significant importance to the implementation of the MDGs in our country. We provided our first national report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2004 and an interim report in 2006, wherein we modified some indicators accompanying specific national needs. The MDGs are incorporated into various Government strategies. Let me also stress that Croatia will fulfil its obligations emerging from the official development assistance commitment scheme.

Croatia is saddened by the fact that, in the twenty-first century, there are still around 72 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and are therefore destined to grow up without the basic right to education and deprived of hope for a better future. We are aware that children in conflict and post-conflict situations need to pursue their education and that effective action by the international community is needed.

We hope that the United Nations and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia will find ways to change the opportunities for their children, especially by abolishing primary school user fees and ensuring safe and equal access to schools for boys and girls. The investment in education that we make in children today will shape our future tomorrow. Therefore the Croatian Government has gone one step further, in accordance with the aforementioned modified indicators, by introducing mandatory secondary education for all.

It is not acceptable that, every year, over 500,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth. High priority must be given to achieving universal access to reproductive health services in national health and poverty reduction frameworks, especially through budget allocations. Laws and awareness-raising campaigns against various forms of harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices cannot be neglected if we want to change the rates of maternal mortality and morbidity.

Is the HIV infection, especially among young people, preventable? It is, but only through a comprehensive approach. The decision to build a functional health system is a political decision in each donor country and in each concerned country. We cannot heal the people without healing the system. The will to make drastic changes in the system must be pledged at the highest political level, and that pledge must be effectively fulfilled on both sides.

Every year, we witness 1.7 million new HIV infections in Africa — a fact that has already resulted in more than 13 million AIDS orphans. It is of the utmost importance to make investments in health systems, to train health personnel and to create cooperation between the State and civil society. The existing coordination mechanisms need more support, and a common framework for monitoring and evaluating progress has to be formed.

Ms. Bethel (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The world has come a long way since the days when people used to steal land from each other and kill each other in the name of survival. We now have human rights laws, humanitarian aid and civil society movements, and we continue to face huge development issues. But we also have the will and the determination to make this world a better place for all. Our efforts to

meet the needs of the world's poorest are a legacy for our children — a legacy of seeking to create a better world for them.

Mr. Mahiga (United Republic of Tanzania): As we begin the second half of the period set for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, for convening this timely thematic debate, focusing on achievements, challenges and getting back on track in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We commend his strategic choice of the MDGs related to poverty, education and health, where progress is most needed, because of their positive impact on other Goals.

I should also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his ongoing efforts to involve key international financial institutions in focusing on scaling up the achievement of the MDGs in Africa, by establishing the Millennium Development Goals Africa Steering Group. Tanzania appreciates that initiative and is encouraged by the demonstrated commitment of the leadership of the United Nations and by the Organization's system-wide engagement in mobilizing the international community to support timely achievement of the MDGs.

Tanzania is, however, concerned by the overall slow progress towards achieving the Goals in Africa by 2015. But we are also encouraged by the spirited efforts of African States to achieve some Goals with respect to which political determination prevails and assistance from development partners is forthcoming. Most developing countries have undertaken economic and governance reforms inspired by the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and agreed upon in the Monterrey Consensus of 2002.

The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed those commitments, but there remain significant gaps and bottlenecks, which need to be urgently addressed at both the political and the implementation levels by all parties in the developed and the developing countries. The commitments made by the developed countries at Gleneagles and Heiligendamm need to be honoured urgently and predictably as part of that mutual obligation. In the meantime, there have been negative trends globally, which are militating against progress in achieving the Goals and which need to be collectively addressed by the international community.

The mixed economic indicators set out in the World Economic Outlook reports for 2007 and 2008 show that the world economy is slowing down. The stalled negotiations of the Doha Development Round on trade preclude any prospects for fair trading practices for developing countries. If this trend regarding outlook and the impasse on trade continues, our efforts to fight poverty and achieve the MDGs will be adversely affected.

In addition, the current energy crisis is depleting the foreign exchange reserves of developing countries, as well as domestic savings. Similarly, climate change is crippling agricultural production and accelerating environmental damage, with far-reaching consequences for economic growth and sustainability. The combined effects of the energy crisis and climate change on Africa are pushing up food prices for countries that depend on food imports and frustrating efforts to fight food shortages and hunger.

The United Nations should continue to show robust leadership on how to address the negative effects of climate change and should, with urgency, assume leadership in spearheading action on the global energy crisis. Without such comprehensive measures, efforts to achieve the MDGs will be seriously behind schedule in many developing countries. It should also be emphasized that investments aimed at achieving the MDGs must be linked to the long-term infrastructure and growth sectors in order to sustain the results of the Goals achieved.

Poverty and hunger are the most visible indicators of human deprivation and insecurity. Halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 is, appropriately, the number-one Goal among the MDGs and is probably the most difficult to achieve, but experience has shown that hunger can be alleviated through policies geared to promoting productivity and growth in the economies of developing countries both in urban and in rural areas. In addition, growth in gross terms should be accompanied by equity measures to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor if poverty reduction is to be effective in real terms.

In Tanzania, the 2005 and 2006 reports on poverty reduction indicated modest progress, but also the need to scale up interventions in that area. Tanzania has formulated its second generation of poverty reduction strategies on the basis of MDGs focusing on results accomplished in achieving goals related to the

reduction of poverty and hunger. The latest figures indicate an average annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent of gross domestic product. However, that increase is minimized by population growth, which stands at 2.9 per cent. The daunting challenge is to translate economic growth into poverty reduction as measured by household income.

Accelerated economic growth is needed in order to enhance the domestic resource base and improve the Government's ability to provide public services. In Tanzania, several development partners have resorted to budget support as a way to enhance aid harmonization and effectiveness. That strategy, coupled with debt relief measures, is enhancing national MDG-based policies to reduce poverty. Further, in February this year, the Governments of the United States of America and Tanzania signed a compact worth $698 million from the Millennium Challenge Account to stimulate sustainable economic investment in key economic sectors, such as infrastructure and energy, and to contribute to poverty eradication efforts. We believe that that historic intervention will support national efforts to achieve the MDGs and to accelerate the country's overall economic development and enhance overall performance in all economic sectors.

In the area of education, net enrolment rates in primary education had risen to 94.8 per cent by 2006. There is near gender parity with regard to the enrolment of girls and boys at the primary school level. Primary school retention rates improved from 71 per cent in 1997 to 79 per cent in 2004 and continue to improve steadily. Tanzania is therefore on track and is sure that it will achieve MDG 2 by 2015. The retention rate for boys in school is slightly higher than that for girls, and there is also major concern regarding the average performance of girls, owing to interruptions in attendance. Equally, there has been a national campaign to expand secondary school enrolment and to correct the gender imbalance in enrolment and retention at the secondary school level.

The target of eliminating illiteracy by 2015 remains a challenge. The Government is committed to enhance the quality and standard of education at all levels through programmes that focus on increasing the number of qualified teachers and improving school facilities and other social amenities that improve the learning environment in school. The overall spending in education has been considerably increased. Eighteen per cent of the annual national budget currently goes towards education.

With regard to health, the Government has developed strategies aimed at reducing infant and child mortality, especially malaria-related morbidity and mortality. Programmes include improved vaccination coverage, availability of services, including drugs at the time of need, integrated management of childhood illnesses rolled over to all districts, efficient implementation of planned programmes and malaria control through use of mosquito nets, particularly insecticide-treated nets. Five out of 10 mothers and children sleep under treated nets.

Under-five mortality decreased from 191 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 133 in 2005. Infant mortality also declined from 115 in 1990 to 68 in 2005. There is steady progress in MDG 4, but it is not as significant as that in the area of universal primary education. Data show that the maternal mortality situation has not changed much in Tanzania and therefore requires significant scaled-up investments and intervention.

The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased by only 5 per cent between 1999 and 2004 and the proportion of births taking place in health facilities by only 3 per cent in the same period. The negative trend in maternal mortality, especially in mainland Tanzania, is compounded by the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, sustained efforts to combat the pandemic in Tanzania have reduced HIV infection rates from 9.1 per cent to 7.7 per cent between 2001 and 2004, and the downward trend is continuing.

The experience of Tanzania shows that a national MDG-based development framework and strategy, combined with timely and predictable resources, can make a significant difference in the progress towards the MDGs. For example, debt relief and reinvestment in education has led to greater expansion and improvement in the education MDG, which will be achieved before 2015. In contrast, MDGs 4 and 5 are lagging behind despite the existence of an elaborate national strategy. It is for this reason that we welcome the five-nations global initiative led by Norway to mobilize additional resources for scaling up investments in the two health related MDGs.

In conclusion, Tanzania calls for more coordinated international and national arrangements for

tracking and speeding up pledges and commitments. The private sector and international financial institutions should also be encouraged to become more involved with MDGs directly and indirectly, in a way similar to the initiative of the Secretary-General with the MDG Africa Steering Group. To this end, we look to the high-level events on 22 and 25 September this year here at the United Nations to refocus attention on the mobilization of resources and to provide fresh momentum in achieving the MDGs in Africa.

Mr. Al-Fayez (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made at the 88th meeting by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on this subject.

The thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015" means we should enhance our efforts to achieve the objectives that have been set. In this context, Saudi Arabia, convinced of the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, gives great importance to the issue of development and efforts to combat poverty and support education and health. Those issues are the building blocks of the eighth development plan for 2005-2009 in Saudi Arabia, which plan emphasizes the importance of stepping up efforts for encouraging economic growth through macroeconomic policies, creation of employment opportunities and improving living standards.

The cornerstone of all those efforts is the reduction of poverty. The 2005-2009 plan emphasizes the most disadvantaged populations by adopting a national strategy to overcome poverty. It allows the poor to have the material and human resources necessary to undertake economic activities and employment while reducing factors of vulnerability such as disease, the economic impact of changes in the market and natural disasters. This plan, in short, helps the poor to confront those challenges.

We have sought to ensure a fair distribution of the fruits of economic growth among regions by improving the methods of production, helping families and small and medium-sized enterprises, improving health and education and municipal services, social security and housing as well as in other ways.

We have sought to strengthen social institutions and charities for combating poverty. Education is the main basis of social and economic development and one of the main factors in sustainable development. Prosperity is the aim of development, and it cannot happen without the full participation of educated and productive individuals who respect high human values and ideals. Therefore, favouring access to all levels of education for all is the basis of development and the best way to combat poverty.

That is why Saudi Arabia emphasized education for all by increasing expenditure on it from its gross national product to 6 per cent by 2004. By 2005, that proportion reached 10 per cent. The number of students enrolled in primary schools, grades 1 to 5, reached 95 per cent in 2005. Our overall goal is to reach 100 per cent enrolment for all children of these grades during the period of the eighth plan.

With regard to health, our health services have seen considerable progress over the last 20 years. That is reflected in the health indicators, including childcare. Under-five mortality rates have decreased to 20 cases per 1,000 live births in 2005. There is a network of health infrastructure with nearly 364 hospitals built by 2004.

We have taken measures to ensure the development of health services by adopting a general health system in 2003 and implementing that programme to ensure health services for the whole population. A public body has been set up to ensure the safety of food and medical, biological and chemical products.

With regard to achieving the MDGs, Saudi Arabia has exceeded the targets set in a number of areas and is on track to meet other targets before the established deadlines. Saudi Arabia is among the developing countries that are participating in most international commitments, chiefly in order to reduce poverty and assist the least developed countries in creating infrastructures for the future.

Achieving development and combating poverty are human and moral responsibilities. In that connection, Saudi Arabia has been assisting poor countries in their efforts to reduce poverty by participating in a ministerial conference of medium-income countries held in Spain in March 2007 in collaboration with the United Nations. The Saudi Fund for Development has allocated part of its budget to

poverty reduction efforts in 28 developing countries, which represented 49 per cent of all assistance during the period 1975 to 2006, and which amounted to $7 billion. We have also contributed to the establishment of a poverty reduction fund under the auspices of the Islamic Development Bank. Our assistance is provided through bilateral cooperation with other developing countries and with the assistance of specialized regional and international multilateral agencies. Between 3.5 and 4 per cent of our gross national product (GNP) is allocated to foreign aid, and in 2007 we ranked ninth in terms of donors.

Saudi Arabia has provided a total of $6.6 billion to fund 369 development projects and economic programmes in 68 countries. Every year, Saudi Arabia contributes to the programmes of agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. We have also contributed to the financing of United Nations assistance programmes, together with other Gulf States, and to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. For the period 2008 to 2010, we intend to allocate $18 million to that Fund for a three-year period, and we have already allocated $10 million for it.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has given $24 billion to more than 14 international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the African Development Bank Group, which has received $25 million. As a member of the African Development Bank Group, Saudi Arabia has contributed to its funding as well as to that of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

Saudi Arabia, given the importance that it attaches to sustainable development, is in the vanguard of those countries that have striven to achieve the MDGs, allocating more than half of its public expenditure to social and educational services. We stress the importance of the role of the United Nations and in particular of the Economic and Social Council in enhancing international cooperation to achieve the MDGs. Promoting ownership by developing countries of their own projects, enhancing their role in the development of financing mechanisms, promoting gender equality and universal education, the advancement of women and improving health services — all these issues should be at the forefront of United Nations efforts.

The success of such efforts will require that we respect the cultural specificities and traditions of developing countries and adopt modes of development that are suited to those countries. Ensuring transparency in the global economy and combating increases in the prices of the basic necessities of the poor are important in that regard. However, none of that can be achieved without international peace, equality and respect for the sovereign rights of developing countries, universal compliance with international law and the settlement of conflict by peaceful and diplomatic means.

Mr. Borg (Malta): Malta associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia at the 88th meeting on behalf of the member States of the European Union.

Three of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are fundamental to the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 — the eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, and health for all — are subjects of scrutiny and timely analysis by this Assembly. Indeed, at the halfway point towards 2015, those three issues are of primordial importance in our challenging quest for a better future for present and future generations. In fact, we are being confronted with what the 2007 United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report called predictably uneven results. In the same report, the Secretary-General clearly points out that there have been some gains but that much remains to be done, particularly in those areas where problems are compounded by widening income inequality, unemployment, warming of the climate, increased urbanization and internal migration, which all are having negative impacts on the socio-economic fabrics of our societies.

Malta believes that the eight Millennium Development Goals are interrelated components forming one whole and that they should be considered and achieved as the universal framework for development. In that regard, notwithstanding its size and its limited resources, Malta has, in line with the commitments made by the European Union, undertaken to reach a ratio of official development assistance (ODA) to gross national income (GNI) of 0.17 per cent by 2010 within its respective budget allocation

processes and to endeavour to increase its ODA/GNI ratio to 0.33 per cent by 2015.

Fully aware of the urgent need for a concrete application of its declared adherence to international solidarity, Malta has likewise earmarked commitments in its 2007 Overseas Development Policy Document, which, among other things, highlights the notion of combating poverty through development. All references to development in the Policy Document are linked to the concept of sustainable development — a precondition for true progress and long-lasting improvement in humankind's standard of living and quality of life.

Furthermore, Malta views development as a fundamental catalyst for ensuring that globalization is a force for good, narrowing the wealth gap and ensuring that the human being and human dignity remain at the centre of economic and political action. That is why poverty eradication and the achievement of all the MDGs are to be priorities for our times. They should be addressed in a multidimensional way, both through the conduct of political and economic decision-making and through social and environmental factors related to different facets such as culture and gender equality, geography, the climate and energy.

Education and training have an overarching relevance to human capacity-building and therefore precondition various aspects of development. At the national level, various targets have been achieved so far in Malta in the areas of universal primary education, including free access to kindergarten; an increased awareness of environmental and gender issues; equal opportunities for all; and promoting acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity through multicultural activities.

In the wider sphere, Malta is contributing educational formation and training programmes for nationals from developing countries through measures such as scholarships at the tertiary level in such areas as democratization and human rights, ageing, information technology and maritime law and through various Commonwealth Third Country Training Programmes, targeting in particular nationals from small island developing countries.

Health is another indisputably important aspect of long-term development. In Malta, monitoring is ongoing, with cases of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria being reported to the Department of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. The number of cases is still relatively small, and treatment for all three diseases is available to all free of charge. Furthermore, the Government of Malta has launched various educational programmes that increase awareness of sexually transmitted diseases. An example is the Sexuality and Relationships Education Programme for Parents with children in primary schools, which has been ongoing since 2002. The main objective of that programme is to provide parents with basic sexuality and relationships education information and tools, which will consequently help them in the parenting of their children. Another case in point is the personal and social development syllabus, in which subjects such as sexually transmitted diseases, personal health and safety and hygiene are tackled, with the aim of helping students to build a positive, healthy lifestyle.

The need for development does not only arise from a moral imperative. A decisive contribution to the eradication of poverty not only creates a more equitable world; it is also a major contribution towards a more peaceful and secure world. We have passed the midpoint between the adoption of the MDGs in 2000 and the target date for the implementation of those Goals in 2015. As stated by the Secretary-General in his foreword to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2007, there is a clear need to take urgent action in order to address the challenges and get back on track to achieve those fundamental goals.

In that regard, Malta looks forward to the high-level event on the MDGs to be held on 25 September 2008 and to working with other Member States in achieving the MDGs by 2015. That achievement is still possible, but only if concrete and joint actions with development partners are immediately increased and sustained. Together we can succeed and truly make a difference.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We would like to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As a developing country, China knows full well the importance of achieving the MDGs. China highly values the vital role played by the United Nations in promoting the implementation of the Goals.

To keep poverty and disease at bay and develop the full potential of all has, for generations, been humanity's pursuit. The MDGs represent the most basic development goals; they are time-bound and can be monitored. It has been eight years since the MDGs were adopted, but progress in meeting the Goals is uneven and too slow.

As 2015 approaches, the international community needs to undertake integrated and effective measures with commitment and a high sense of urgency to accelerate the implementation of the MDGs. In that connection, the Chinese delegation wishes to make the following points on how to implement the MDGs.

First, we must focus on priorities while bearing in mind the overall picture. China appreciates the President's decision to make poverty eradication, education and health the themes of the debate. Those three aspects, which are both mutually reinforcing and mutually constraining, are indeed at the core of the MDGs. It is China's view that, in implementing the MDGs, poverty reduction should remain at top of the agenda and should be used to promote development in other areas. As the majority of the poor live in rural areas, it is imperative to give preference to the rural poor.

Secondly, we must strengthen the capacities of developing countries. Economic globalization presents new opportunities, but many developing countries are caught in the poverty trap. It is therefore imperative for developing countries to strengthen their capacity and accelerate development by taking advantage of the opportunities that come with globalization. To achieve such a goal, developing countries' efforts are very important, but external support is also indispensable.

Thirdly, we must expand the partnership among all stakeholders to support the efforts of developing countries. For most developing countries, achieving the MDGs on time will require strong financial and technical support. Developed countries should show sincerity in fulfilling their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance. Developing countries have a fine tradition of helping each other. Looking forward, they should further expand South-South cooperation, increasing support to the least developed countries and African countries in particular. In addition, flexible means should be employed to encourage the involvement of civil society and the private sector and to mobilize all of society to promote development.

Fourthly, we must give full play to the role of the United Nations. We have always advocated the establishment of an MDG monitoring and evaluation mechanism to gauge the progress made by specific countries and monitor the fulfilment of international commitments. The United Nations system has unique advantages vis-à-vis developing countries. United Nations agencies should bear in mind the priority areas of individual developing countries and help them resolve the most pressing problems through financial and technical support and capacity-building.

As the most populous developing country, China has worked vigorously and earnestly to implement the MDGs. China is the first country to reach the target of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty. The target of achieving universal primary education, among others, was met ahead of schedule in China.

Of course, China's economic foundation is not strong, and the fruit of its development must be shared by 1.3 billion people. China's per capita gross domestic product still ranks lower than one hundredth in the world. There is still a long way to go to ensure that development is shared by all.

China attaches great importance to South-South cooperation and has done what it can to support other developing countries in achieving common progress. Over the years, through grants and interest-free and preferential loans, China has assisted more than 100 developing countries in developing various projects that have had a direct bearing on the lives and work of local people. China has also sent medical teams to developing countries: 48 medical teams with over 1,200 medical personnel are now working in 47 countries. That assistance has helped improve the life of the local people and promote economic development and the achievement of the MDGs in recipient countries. As China's economy and abilities grow, we will continue to engage in and expand, as appropriate, South-South cooperation in order to bring benefits to more people.

Our experience shows that the MDGs are not only imperative, but attainable targets. Opportunities await us. China will continue to work with all other countries to make it happen.

Ms. Sene (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): There could be no better or more appropriate time than the one the Assembly President has chosen to bring us together to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a subject of great importance to our country. The time is appropriate because the deadline of 2015 is fast approaching. Therefore, we should assess what has been achieved as we come around the final bend. It is also appropriate if we consider the current difficult international environment, characterized by increases in energy and food prices, as well as by the threats posed by climate change to the productive capacities and security of poor countries.

Before going any further, allow me to align my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the least developed countries, and the Group of African States, respectively.

I would also like, on behalf of my country, to thank the United Nations for having selected Senegal as one of the eight pilot countries for the Millennium Project. This highly appreciated assistance has enabled us to enhance the effectiveness of our sectoral strategies in achieving the MDGs.

We particularly welcome the debate on this theme, since the MDGs offer improved prospects for well-being and development and reflect the hopes of millions of human beings in poor countries.

This is why I will limit my statement to briefly touch upon a few indicators illustrating Senegal's progress in achieving the MDGs.

In regards to poverty, the implementation of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), covering the period 2003-2005, resulted in a significant drop in household poverty. It dropped from 48.5 per cent in 2002 to 42 per cent in 2005. At this rate, projections put the number of poor at 33.6 per cent in 2015, as opposed to the 33.5 per cent target.

If Senegal has been able to achieve such a reduction in the poverty index, it is due to a large extent to macroeconomic performance. Economic growth has been on a positive track, averaging 5 per cent annually in recent years. This has been in the context of improved public finance management, control of inflation, which is now less than 2 per cent a year, and the consolidation of other macroeconomic aggregates, with a 21 per cent rate of investment.

With regard to combating malnutrition, the halving of the incidence of underweight by 2015 could still be achieved with implementation of programmes such as the integrated children's health-care strategy, the integrated package of activities for nutrition and the nutrition enhancement programme. Thus, there was a drop in the incidence of underweight from 20 per cent to 17 per cent between 1992 and 2005.

As for education, we note that more than 90 per cent of Senegalese children are now enrolled in school, compared to 72 per cent in 2002. Gender equality has been achieved. This being said, efforts still need to be made to ensure faster improvement in graduation rates, which rose from 36 per cent in 2000 to a mere 45 per cent in 2006.

With regard to health indicators, the installation of properly equipped operating rooms and subsidies to help with the cost of caesarean births in the poorest regions with high maternal mortality rates have led, inter alia, to a drop in infant mortality from 150 per 1,000 births in 1992 to 121 per 1,000 in 2005. Maternal mortality has fallen from 510 deaths per 100,000 live births in the period 1986-1992 to 401 per 100,000 in the period 1998-2005. However, despite these positive developments, at this rate, we will not be able to achieve the goal of a two thirds reduction by 2015 and additional efforts are therefore required.

Finally, in terms of diseases, HIV/AIDS prevalence is now 0.7 per cent — less than 1 per cent. This is paired with a drop of approximately 90 per cent in the cost of antiretroviral treatment. At the same time, malaria represents 35 per cent of all medical visits and it continues to be a major cause of mortality and morbidity among the vulnerable groups of pregnant women and children under five. Tuberculosis is still a priority for Senegal, whose objective is to cure 80 per cent of smear-positive cases of pulmonary tuberculosis.

As can be seen, despite these achievements, the challenges that remain are enormous. This is why Senegal decided to emphasize four main areas in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for 2006-2010. These are: creating wealth for a pro-poor growth strategy; improving access to basic social services; protection from and prevention and management of the risks of natural disasters; and good governance and decentralized and participatory development.

In closing, I would like to join other delegations in emphasizing that there can be no miracle cure here. Far from a foregone conclusion, poverty is the result of man-made inequalities and injustices. It must and can be eradicated. In order to do so, we need to follow up our words with action. It is not too late to take action if tomorrow we do not want to carry the burden of responsibility of having failed to meet the MDGs deadline of 2015 on behalf of the thousands of women, children and others who live and suffer in want.

Let us act together, then, to meet the primary challenge of achieving the MDGs: the challenge of honouring the commitments undertaken as part of our partnerships.

Mr. Desta (Eritrea): Henry Ford, a great American industrialist and a name known to us all, once said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success". The coming together of our leaders in September 2000, when they declared the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), was the beginning of a noble commitment to do good for human society. The subsequent years kept us together to make progress on our goals: the goal of halving poverty; achieving universal primary education; reducing the deaths of our children under five years of age and the maternal mortality of their mothers by two thirds; and reversing the spread of the killer HIV/AIDS and eliminating malaria and other diseases.

Have we made progress by keeping together in the past seven and a half years? That is a question that all of us must ponder. But the more important question to ponder at this mid-life crisis of the MDGs is the last part of Ford's wisdom: "Working together is success". That makes this debate and the current presidency of the General Assembly so important. I should commend the President for bringing us together to address the challenges and get back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015, as the theme of this debate states.

The MDGs should remain the priority of the United Nations and that of the international community's development agenda. The MDGs are the most unifying and cross-cutting goals in the United Nations system. I believe we can do it with renewed commitment and partnership at this midway point. The 2007 Millennium Development Goals Report gives us a sense of optimism by stating on page 4 that:

> "The MDGs will be attained only if concerted additional action is taken immediately and sustained until 2015. All stakeholders need to fulfil, in their entirety, the commitments they made in the Millennium Declaration and subsequent pronouncements."

Goals are not predicted; they are promised. If we do not deliver on those promises, we would be terribly disappointing the people who are looking up to us, and we would be judged by history. Failure to achieve the MDGs will adversely affect the credibility of our multilateralism. The same report further states, on page 5, that:

> "Success in achieving the MDGs in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries cannot be achieved by these countries alone. Developed countries need to deliver fully on long-standing commitments to achieve the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2015."

My country, Eritrea, is committed, and is doing its best, to achieve the MDGs, some earlier than required and others at the appointed time, 2015. It has invested hundreds of millions of dollars, especially in infrastructure for food security, to make hunger history. It is encouraging to note, in its first national Millennium Development Report of November 2006, the executive summary of which has been circulated with my statement, that:

> "Eritrea is on track to achieve the MDGs relating to gender equality in primary education, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, and access to safe water."

At independence in 1993, Eritrea inherited a devastated economy and infrastructure, a large exiled population and an empty treasury. The Government then began to rehabilitate and reconstruct the nation and the economy. Its efforts paid dividends. For the period from 1993 to 1997, the economy grew by 7.4 per cent; inflation was kept at below 5 per cent; and Eritrea had accumulated foreign reserves that covered seven months of imports. As Eritrea's economy was just moving towards a sustainable level of steady growth, the border war in 1998 and successive droughts during the past years prevented smooth development. Perhaps the single most important

constraint to its development today is the no-peace no-war status.

Despite those challenges, it is gratifying to witness that Eritrea is projected to achieve most of the relevant MDG targets by 2015. We realize, however, that this is no cause for celebration, for three reasons. First, Eritrea is off-track in two crucial areas: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; and achievement of universal primary education. Secondly, the general consensus is that the MDGs, even if they were to be fully achieved, represent only minimum benchmarks rather than the culmination of full development itself. Thirdly, the road map to 2015 is based on crucial assumptions, including the resolution of the no-peace no-war status; the absence of drought; robust performance of the economy; and the successful mobilization of the resources — both domestic and international — necessary for the achievement of the MDGs.

Achieving the MDGs requires human, material and financial investments in economic, social and physical infrastructure. An important part of the exercise is the additional cost assessment exercise: that it will cost Eritrea approximately $1.47 billion over the period from 2004 to 2015, an average of some $134 million a year, to achieve the MDGs. That cost is in addition to the core development expenditure that the Government of Eritrea allocates from its own resources and the contributions of its development partners.

In conclusion, it is this delegation's hope that Member States, United Nations agencies and the international community gathered here will work together, in true partnership, to make the MDGs a success. Then and only then will we be able to see accomplishments that we can all be proud of. Let us go to work and make it happen.

Mr. Khaleel (Maldives): At the outset, let me convey my delegation's sincere appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this important debate and for the leadership that he has been demonstrating.

The exceptional levels of interest, commitment and dedication on the part of the entire international community are slowly but surely starting to bear fruit. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 is a clear report card of the work that we have accomplished over the span of seven years. Much indeed has been achieved, but much more needs to be done.

While the number of people living in extreme poverty may have declined, nearly half a billion people are still living in poverty below the line of less than $1 a day. While progress has been recorded in school enrolment, nearly 72 million children are still deprived of primary education. While efforts to bridge the gender gap are finally taking hold in many countries, millions of women are still continuing to die in childbirth and are marginalized. While measures to control and reverse communicable diseases are starting to work in some regions, it is alarming that there are still an estimated 1.7 million new infections of HIV per year in Africa alone. And while conditions in sanitation may have improved in some countries and regions, we cannot ignore the fact that there are millions who do not have access to basic sanitation and safe drinking water.

Despite the setbacks that the Maldives suffered owing to the Asian tsunami in 2004, thanks to careful planning, prudent policies, strong leadership and the hard work of our people, together with the generous assistance and cooperation of our development partners, we are back on track to meet most of the MDG targets by 2015.

We have already achieved Goal 1, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and Goal 2, achieve universal primary education. Today, 98 per cent of our children are in school. We are also on track to achieve Goals 4, 5 and 6 — reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat communicable diseases, respectively. Over the past decade, the maternal mortality rate dropped from 258 to 69 per 100,000 live births, and child mortality decreased from 48 to 16 per 1,000 live births. While challenges remain, significant progress has also been achieved in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and concerted efforts are being made to meet the nutrition targets for children. The MDGs are fully integrated into our seventh national development plan.

Sustaining the remarkable progress that we have achieved is, however, proving to be a formidable challenge. As development assistance and favourable market access dwindle owing to our impending graduation from the group of least developed countries, and as global environmental degradation escalates, adapting to those new realities will not be easy for a

country with a fragile economy that depends solely on the sustainability of its environmental resources. Although the destruction caused by the tsunami may not be directly linked to the threats posed by global climate change, it certainly has given us a glimpse of the extent of the vulnerabilities that we face and of the serious effects that climate change and rising sea levels could bring to our shores.

The frequency and strength of the extreme weather patterns that we have recently been experiencing are slowly eating away at our islands. The surrounding ocean, which had sustained life on our islands for centuries, now seems more foe than friend. Frequent flooding due to storm surges and coastal erosion is now becoming a permanent feature on our islands, forcing us to divert our limited resources from strategic development to a cycle of destruction and reconstruction. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has projected a rise of 2 degrees Celsius in global temperature and a 90-centimetre rise in mean sea level by the end of the century. Not only would that threaten our development; it also would without a doubt kill our prized coral reefs, the very lifeblood of our economy, and even threaten the very existence of our island nation.

Therefore, in our view, achieving Goal 7 — ensure environmental sustainability — remains central to the success of our work. For us, climate change is not a future possibility; it is present, it is real, it is ongoing and it is directly linked to our development. It is also an issue of human security and survival.

We are therefore absolutely convinced that it is important for the international community to be conscious of the human dimensions of climate change as we continue our quest to find solutions. It was on the basis of that firm conviction and belief that we submitted a draft resolution at the recently concluded seventh session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The draft resolution, entitled "Climate change and human rights", co-sponsored by more than 75 countries, is aimed simply at giving a human face to climate change. I should like to take this opportunity to formally thank all the sponsors of that important draft resolution and all those who supported us.

As we embark on the second half of the 15-year target period, let us learn from the past and prepare for the future. The door to achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves is still wide open. However, we do not have the luxury of time, nor can we survive by speaking hollow words. What is needed now is swift and targeted practical action — action to fulfil the commitments that we have made at various summits and conferences to protect and preserve the global environment, to reduce and eliminate poverty and hunger and to achieve sustainable development.

Most important, we need to properly fund the various action programmes upon which we have agreed for the most vulnerable groups among us — the small island developing States, the least developed countries and the landlocked developing countries. The partnership envisaged in Goal 8 is the key. Indeed, we have the capacity and the resources to do this; all that we need is concerted political will on the part of all.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank the President for taking the initiative to hold a thematic debate of the General Assembly to discuss progress made in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda at the 88th meeting on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the 89th meeting on behalf of the Group of African States. We should like to make a few specific observations.

At the halfway point to the date set for achieving the MDGs, our thematic debate comes at a decisive stage in fulfilling the commitments made. Algeria, which has fully supported the MDGs, is well on the way to attaining most of the objectives set for 2015. Every effort has been made to combat poverty, illiteracy, hunger, inequalities between the sexes, child and maternal mortality and environmental degradation. Despite the progress made in several areas by developing countries, achievements remain mixed, since several countries where extreme poverty prevails among large sectors of the population, particularly in Africa, are not firmly on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

The MDGs offer a distinct opportunity to developing countries, the international community and the United Nations to improve the effectiveness of development actors. Implementing the MDGs also provides an opportunity to give effect to the principle of shared responsibility and obligations. That principle is at the heart of the MDGs and must be given effect

through concrete measures, principally in the area of financing for development.

It is true that progress has been made at the global level with regard to some development objectives, particularly those related to the fight against poverty. That progress, which has been made essentially through national efforts, should be supported with concrete actions by the international community.

The examples of success in Africa and in other regions encourage us to undertake robust efforts to implement the commitments made at the national and international levels, particularly by supporting national policies and increasing investment. We reaffirm the importance of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a framework for development. The implementation of NEPAD is undoubtedly contributing to the achievement of the MDGs. Indeed, it should be among the priorities of United Nations development programmes.

The international community should redouble its efforts to follow up on the commitments made, in order to support development. To that end, we must make more rapid progress in achieving the MDGs, by linking initiatives aimed at achieving the Goals to national development strategies. It is also important to create a national and international environment conducive to economic growth, to the strengthening of human development and to an increase in development assistance.

While it is widely acknowledged that it is primarily up to the developing countries themselves to achieve the MDGs, it remains no less true that the international community has a very important role to play in the implementation of the MDGs, particularly by reducing the pitfalls and the impact of systemic asymmetries. That can be done by resolutely finalizing and implementing a comprehensive global partnership for development in order to avoid the drawbacks inherent in a fragmentary approach.

We should draw every possible lesson to ensure the viability of the MDGs, because we are convinced that success in their implementation will depend not only on national and international contributions, but also, and in large part, on coordination among local, national and international actors. The MDGs should not be limited to technical assistance, but should also emphasize indicators of long-term development.

Most of the MDGs can be achieved if we redouble our efforts and adopt a holistic and non-selective approach. To that end, to consolidate the progress and accomplishments in achieving the Goals, the same attention should be given to establishing an international partnership for development.

Achieving the MDGs is still possible with a redoubling of efforts and with support from the international community so that we can take advantage of new opportunities, in close coordination with international institutions responsible for development and in partnership with the private sector and civil society. We hope that our debate will lead to renewed national and international efforts to better meet needs so that we can achieve the MDGs and to emphasize the pertinence of international support for development.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this morning's meeting. We will hear the remaining speakers this afternoon, beginning at 3 o'clock.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.

United Nations A/62/PV.93

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

93rd plenary meeting
Thursday, 3 April 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ehouzou (Benin), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this meeting in such a timely fashion. My delegation wishes to express its support for the statement made at the 88th meeting by Minister Massiah of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and, at the same meeting, by the Ambassador of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. I will now deliver my country's statement.

As one of the three pillars that support and guide the United Nations, development is a complex, changing process that must be carried out through a multiplicity of interrelated activities. Initially it might appear that development concerns only lower- and middle-income countries, but that would be a short-sighted way of understanding the significance of the interrelatedness of countries, cultures and individuals. Development, or the lack thereof, is everyone's business. International migratory flows of tremendous numbers of workers or of poor people seeking to alleviate their situation in another place are a clear illustration of what I am talking about. The endurance of obstacles to exports from developing countries to developed countries can aggravate that phenomenon, which was so graphically described by the President of my country, Mr. Óscar Arias, when he said that if we cannot export our products to your markets, the harsh reality is that we will export our people. Nobody wants that.

The steep increase in the price of oil and, subsequently, of fuel and now of staple foods for the poor and middle class has brought this reality home to the immense majority of the 6 billion inhabitants of this planet.

Since we are speaking of the planet, the unexpected break-up of an ice sheet in Antarctica and the stifling summer heat in Europe remind us that we cannot escape the fact that what a community does on the Pacific coast will sooner or later manifest itself on the Atlantic coast, thousands of miles away. The effect of human activity on the soil, rivers, the ocean and the atmosphere will have an impact on all the inhabitants of the planet.

That is why, in order to ensure that development is a source of life and not a cause of death and deterioration, it must be sustainable development and must avoid waste. It must spread knowledge and not consumerism. It must reduce spending on arms and increase investment in health, education, roads and housing. That is what we propose in the Costa Rica Consensus, in other words, to reward countries that

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reduce military spending and increase social investments.

When, in September 2000, the heads of State and Government of the Member States reaffirmed here, in this building, their faith in the Organization and its Charter as the indispensable foundation of a more peaceful, prosperous and fair world, they were committing their countries to eliminating the obstacles that prevent the provision of food, education and health to everyone. In some cases, that commitment would begin by doing everything possible to put an end to a war that, among its many evils, robs children and young people of their future. It is absurd to maintain a permanent war. Is it not better to seek an accommodation, even if it falls short of everything one wants? In politics, one needs more courage to agree than to disagree. Such courage is necessary for peace agreements.

At the same time, in order to honour their commitments, donor countries must devote 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to official development assistance. In all countries, that commitment means governing while improving the allocation of resources in national budgets and more effectively and efficiently implementing governmental programmes of action. We must acknowledge today that, for one reason or another, the commitments made at the 2000 Summit have only been honoured halfway in most cases. Unfortunately, especially in countries and regions beset by armed conflict, the results leave a lot to be desired. At the same time, we must underscore that there has been some significant progress, especially where there is no war and where Governments are committed to achieving the Goals.

Allow me now to refer to some results and to the status of compliance with the Millennium Development Goals in my own country.

First, in 2000, poverty affected 20.6 per cent of our households. In 2006 it had dropped to 20.2 per cent. The greatest reduction was in 2007, when the rate was 17 per cent. That means that we are still far from meeting the Goal but, if the pace of reduction between 2006 and 2007 is maintained, our country will succeed in achieving the goal of reducing poverty by 50 per cent by 2015 — that is to say that 10 per cent or fewer households will be in poverty.

Second, the rate of primary school enrolment in my country is almost 100 per cent. We do not have more recent statistics, but it is important to underscore that efforts have been made for almost two years now to increase enrolment and retention in both primary and secondary schools — but especially in secondary schools, where enrolment rates are below 100 per cent.

Third, gender equality indicators have improved. It is interesting to note that the primary school enrolment rate is the same for boys and girls, and that there are 10 per cent more young women than men enrolled in secondary schools. Women now make up 40 per cent of the members of parliament, thanks to affirmative action laws that establish minimum gender quotas. The rate of women's participation in the labour force rose from 35 to 40 per cent between 2000 and 2005. However, female unemployment also increased in the same period, from 6.8 to 9.6 per cent.

Fourth, between 2000 and 2005, infant mortality dropped from 10.4 to 9.5 deaths per 100,000 live births, while under-five mortality dropped from 2.4 to 2 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Fifth, on average, maternal mortality remained the same between 2000 and 2005, namely, 3.4 per 10,000 live births.

Sixth, in the same period, the rate of mortality from HIV/AIDS dropped from 3 to 2.7 per 100,000, with tuberculosis deaths dropping from 3 to 1.3 per 100,000. With regard to malaria, we have data available only until 2003, by which deaths from the disease had dropped from 1.4 in 2000 to 0.5 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Seventh, there are fewer indicators on ensuring the sustainability of the environment. The most relevant thing is that the percentage of the population with access to water remained at 97.4 per cent in the years 2000 and 2005. At the same time, the percentage of people with access to potable water rose from 75 per cent in 2000 to 82.3 per cent in 2005. Moreover, in 2007, our country experienced net growth in forested land, following decades of deforestation.

As can be observed, and as the human development index indicates, Costa Rica is a country with a high level of social development. Coverage for health and education services is nearly 100 per cent. Our already high rates in the health area are continuing to improve. Nevertheless, the problem of reducing — and much less, eradicating — poverty has not yet been solved. As I said, the poverty rate remained the same in

the first six years of this millennium. It was only in 2007 that a meaningful improvement was apparent.

The current Government has refocused its efforts to that end, without sacrificing other areas of development. To the contrary, we have strengthened infrastructure, both as regards roads and communications in general. That has been possible through improved tax collection and a more effective allocation of public funds, at a time when the economy experienced sustained growth in recent years at an average annual rate of 6 per cent or more. By reaching the goals that have been set and maintaining the achievements of the past two years, Costa Rica will be in a position to say that it is on track to achieve the 2010 goals and prepared to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, including the most elusive and perhaps most important goal of all: reducing poverty to 10 per cent of the population by 2015, and hopefully reducing it even further.

In order to achieve all that, however, it is necessary to continue policies that keep economic growth at an annual rate of 6 per cent or more, in a way consistent with improving the environment as regards air quality, waste disposal and greenhouse gas reduction. Costa Rica intends to be a carbon-neutral country by 2021. Everything to which I have referred presupposes that there will be high quality governance in the context of a democratic system that increasingly involves citizens as the managers of development.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): The President of the General Assembly deserves our appreciation for convening this timely debate on the progress made towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In the Millennium Declaration and at subsequent conferences, countries on either side of the development agenda made certain commitments. Developing countries would take ownership of their own development, provide good governance, improve their reform of the economic and social sectors and achieve certain indicators of development. Developed partners would provide the necessary resources and an enabling environment, including freer access to their markets, debt relief, capacity-building, technology transfer and sustained flows of investment.

Developing countries have made great strides, since those commitments were made, especially in poverty reduction and with regard to many other MDGs. But those achievements have been restricted to some regions and countries. The achievement of the MDGs in the world's poorest countries, where the so-called bottom billion are mostly concentrated, hangs precariously on the sustained flow of resources and the enabling environment to which we committed ourselves in those compacts.

Moreover, the achievement of the MDGs is threatened by the spread of HIV/AIDS, humanitarian crises, conflicts and the new challenges of climate change. The world's poor and hungry people are being further marginalized by increasing oil and food prices. The continuing deadlock in the negotiations of the Doha Development Agenda and the lack of a sustained flow of migrant workers from the developing to the developed world continues to stymie the opportunities that the market could offer to boost their efforts in achieving the MDGs.

When we adopted the MDGs and the Monterrey Consensus, we did not take into account the threat of climate change, especially the urgent need for adaptation in the most vulnerable countries. How that can be done without diverting the resources committed to their development should be considered seriously in the forthcoming review of the Monterrey Consensus.

Whereas it is important that the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness should be implemented in order to achieve better results, it cannot substitute for sustained flows of additional resources to developing countries. It has become clear that without the sincere fulfilment of the commitments made by developed countries, the MDGs cannot be fully attained in the time remaining.

Poverty reduction is central to all the MDGs. We cannot possibly think of achieving the other goals without reducing poverty. Failure in poverty reduction would mean that millions of people will continue to languish in crippling poverty and hunger on less than $1 a day, even after 2015. That is unacceptable in a world that has so many resources at its disposal and that spends so much on armaments and luxury.

The panellists have clearly pointed out what works for poverty reduction and other MDGs. Today, it is clear that growth alone cannot guarantee that we will achieve the MDGs. Despite the sound economic growth of the past six years, many African countries are still far away from achieving their MDG targets.

Growth must be accompanied by targeted investment, such as in the agriculture and social sectors.

It is important to mention here that the achievement of all the internationally agreed development goals, especially the compacts on the countries with special situations, is crucial to meeting the MDGs. For example, this year we are reviewing the Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries. Similarly, last year we reviewed the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. The recommendations of those reviews should be implemented with all the seriousness they deserve.

Nepal has achieved mixed progress in the attainment of the MDGs. Despite the past 12 years of internal conflict, there has been substantive progress in poverty reduction. Nepal's rate of poverty dropped from 42 per cent in 1996 to 31 per cent in 2004. The current interim development plan, for the period 2008 to 2010, aims at reducing poverty to below 24 per cent. We are therefore on track to achieving the goal of halving poverty by 2015.

Reports have shown that we have made great strides in achieving universal primary enrolment, with 85 per cent of our children attending school, as compared to 64 per cent in 1990. We may achieve that target as well. There has also been good progress with regard to health-related MDGs. The under-five child mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio have been reduced substantially. But we have yet to make substantive progress in combating HIV/AIDS.

Although Nepal has been able to maintain macroeconomic stability, both the population growth rate and growth rate of our gross domestic product have hovered around 2 per cent, straining our efforts to achieve the MDGs. Nepal's interim plan for the period 2008 to 2010 aims at reducing poverty and achieving 5.5 per cent annual economic growth. It also seeks to integrate the MDGs into the national development strategy. But we are constrained by our huge post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction needs. We are confident that our development partners will continue to support us in these endeavours.

We hope that the ongoing political transformation process, including the forthcoming elections to the constituent assembly on 10 April of this year, will pave the way forward for further accelerating our efforts in achieving the MDGs, while creating an environment for long-term peace, development and stability in the country.

In conclusion, the success of MDGs will be judged by their implementation. At this crucial halfway point, we have an opportunity for soul-searching and retrospection to find ways for better implementation in the remaining time. We should not engage in the business of reinventing the wheel or restating the obvious. We need a strategy for better implementation of our commitments, and perhaps a mechanism to monitor the commitments made by both sides. We must not miss the opportunity to fine-tune our commitments, with a view to achieving the full implementation of the MDGs by 2015. That is how partnership — global partnership for development — counts.

Nepal looks forward to actively participating in the review, including the high-level event on the midterm review of the MDGs on 25 September of this year.

Mr. Towpik (Poland): I would like to fully associate myself with the statement delivered yesterday by the Ambassador of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. Allow me to add a few remarks from the Polish perspective.

We do recognize that now, at the midpoint on our way to 2015, the international community needs to step up efforts aimed at the timely achievement of the commitments undertaken in 2000. That is why Poland decided to join the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Call to Action Declaration, which was presented in July 2007 on the initiative of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. We believe that the high-level meeting on the MDGs to be held in September 2008 bringing together all stakeholders — Governments, the business sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups — will provide a good opportunity to assess the progress made so far. We hope, as well, that this meeting will be a strong incentive to speed up our joint efforts to achieve the MDGs.

Thanks to our success in the field of political and economic transformation, Poland has been assuming a new role in the international arena. We have become a donor country. Our participation and engagement in international development cooperation and in supporting countries undergoing social and economic transformation has been growing systematically. We have taken up the commitment of increasing our

official development assistance (ODA) and have set a target of devoting 0.17 per cent of our gross national income to ODA by 2010. We have been making steady and concrete progress towards that goal. As a result, in 2006, the volume of Polish ODA increased by 40 per cent, as compared to 2005, and amounted to almost 0.1 per cent of our gross national income, or almost $300 million. At the same time that we are scaling up our development assistance, we are strongly supporting the principles of aid effectiveness as defined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and in the European Consensus on Development.

We share the view that our response to climate change should be seen in the context of a development agenda. Climate change has the most devastating effect on the poorest and most vulnerable, and it makes achievement of the development goals more difficult. Addressing the challenge of climate change also means addressing a wide range of issues of development, health, demographic change and natural disasters. Indeed, any integrated approach to achieving sustainable development must include measures connected with the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

With this approach in mind, Poland is particularly honoured to host the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in December in Poznan. The conference will sum up the achievements of the Convention and the results attained within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol.

We would like to ensure that the conference in Poznan makes an important contribution to setting out specific measures in the scope of climate change mitigation and adaptation. At the Poznan conference, we will want to draw special attention to the issue of modern technology and technology transfers to developing countries, as well as to measures related to adaptation to climate change and, in particular, to the principles and functioning of the Adaptation Fund. A United Nations conference will be an excellent forum for demonstrating existing good practices and possibilities in the field of technology transfer and adaptation measures. The Poznan conference should also be an important milestone towards reaching consensus on differentiated commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Copenhagen conference in 2009.

Mr. Lima (Cape Verde) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate Assembly President Srgjan Kerim for the opportunity he has afforded us to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Cape Verde associates itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Group of African States.

I cannot fail to welcome the interesting initiative of Mr. Robert Zoellick, former United States Trade Representative and now President of the World Bank, to ask wealth funds to invest 1 per cent in poor countries. This would allow us to accrue $30 billion for Africa. He believes that this is a long-term investment, and that a long-term investment is more sustainable than debt. I also wanted to note this because I thought that it was a very interesting initiative and was relevant to our discussions.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not a panacea. They give us the opportunity to think about development issues taken together, both at national and international levels. We must build solid ongoing ties in the various spheres of action, power and dialogue so that we may complete our common endeavours.

Achieving the MDGs, of course, depends first of all on our countries taking ownership of them and shouldering our responsibility. But this is also — and especially — a shared responsibility in the context of globalization. Responsibility means overall political will, which involves the strengthening of partnerships, external debt relief for developing countries and the increasing of official development assistance (ODA). The Millennium Development Goals will remain incomplete if we do not imbue them with the values of partnership, interdependence and solidarity.

To talk about the Millennium Development Goals is, first and foremost, to talk about three things: political will, partnership and interdependence. Political will is part of development, just as change is a part of life. Nothing can be done without meeting this rational requirement. In Cape Verde, we have always thought that a country such as ours, which is small and poor, cannot let itself be unstable and unpredictable as well. We became accustomed to this fact early on through our past of slavery, colonial domination and cyclical famine; we developed the habit of thinking about our common future, of dreaming about change and working for the common good. Since

independence, in 1975, owing to our catastrophic social, economic and environmental situations, we have set priorities and defined a vision of our own future.

We have focused on education and health for all and created the conditions to attain them. We recognized early that we were all equal before the law. And early on, we placed gender high on our State-building agenda. We have edified the rule of law and promoted modern justice that is progressively independent, and we have worked for the advent of democracy.

Through successive administrations, we have observed in our country that transparent elections can be held without major problems. Complaints are examined by tribunals, and Supreme Court decisions are respected. Good political and economic governance has enabled us to develop a healthy economy, and we are in a positive phase which saw our country come out of the category of least developed countries into that of middle-income countries in January of this year.

We have just been accepted into the World Trade Organization and have established a special partnership with the European Union which we hope will give us greater economic stability as well as more possibilities for investment in sustainable development. Of course, we are also strengthening our South-South relationships.

The figures speak for themselves. In the last few years, under-five mortality has gradually gone down from 56 per 1,000 in 1998 to 39 per 1,000 in 2000 and to 33 per 1,000 in 2005. We can affirm that infant mortality has been reduced by almost 41 per cent. But the objective set by the MDGs is to reduce this figure to 18.7 per 1,000 live births.

Since the 1990s, maternal death rates have been steadily decreasing, from 30 deaths per 1,000 in 2003 to 14.5 per 1,000 in 2005. Taking as a reference point the maternal mortality rate in 1995, which was 69 per 1,000, the goal is to bring this rate down to 17.3 by 2015. We can affirm that in Cape Verde we surpassed this objective in 2005. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Cape Verde was 0.8 per cent in 2005.

We have made progress towards a sustainable environment. The percentage of the population with access to water was 42 per cent in 1990; it increased to 82 per cent in 2005. We think that it will increase to 91 per cent in 2015. Bearing in mind the overall objectives stipulated for this sector, we can affirm that Cape Verde had already surpassed its objective in 2004. We are focusing on quality for the future. Efforts will have to be made to prevent wasting water in agriculture and to provide more and cheaper water for people, especially for the poorest.

With regard to the development of a global partnership for development, in order for our country to meet all the MDGs by 2015 and to avoid backsliding towards negative socio-economic indicators, it is important that the volume of official development assistance should not decrease in the coming years. It will be necessary to build partnerships with the countries of the North and to strengthen South-South cooperation in order to eliminate the deficits that continue to exist with regard to the provision of health and educational services and to provide basic infrastructure to the neediest. We emphasize the need for ongoing initiatives to lighten, reduce or eliminate debt.

We still have political will, which is crucial to making progress. However, our geographic vulnerabilities, which stem from the fact that we are an archipelago with the intrinsic determinants of an archipelago, from desertification and from a lack of natural resources, mean that trade on unequal terms is a factor that can wipe out our development completely.

Partnership implies an awareness that the exchange of goods, which is trade, requires fair prices, the taking into account of everyone's interests and, above all, the willingness to end trade on unequal terms. Trade on unequal terms has continued into the twenty-first century. Who would dare to say that all is well in the best of all possible worlds when poor countries do not control the prices of their products, when competition is distorted by subsidies that perpetuate the poverty of the farmers in the South, when all the efforts made by the Governments of the non-oil-producing countries of the South to achieve development and good governance are nullified by the repercussions caused by the dizzying increases in the price of oil and imported consumer goods, and when the alleviation or cancellation of public debt merely occurs in dribs and drabs? Are international trade structures adapted to the new requirements of the balanced partnership that we all advocate? Are those structures adapted to the efforts made by developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development

Goals, especially by least developed, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries? Documents issued by various United Nations agencies, independent organizations and well-regarded research scientists reveal that there is manifest inadequacy and that there are enormous possibilities yet to be explored or utilized in order to achieve a better understanding of reality and take decisive steps in the right direction.

Partnership is not the perpetuation of the domination of the weakest by the strongest. Neither does it mean the imposition of norms, structures and categories that only serve to promote the interests of some to the detriment of others or to enslave rather than to facilitate development, progress and liberation. What I am talking about here and now is the long genocide of children in the decaying neighbourhoods of our large cities, who search through garbage cans for something to eat instead of going to school, who become intoxicated with marijuana or inhale glue in order to forget that society has forgotten them and who become drunk with their own degeneration, in a world where justice and opportunities are reserved for others.

Someone spoke about the rights of children. But the State where the rule of law prevails, of which we are so proud, contains pockets of humanity without rights, where children become adults too fast and die without having enjoyed childhood. If Voltaire's Candide were alive today, he would certainly be surprised at our speeches and words, at our "urbi et orbi" proclamations of our progress — progress ensnared by the shameful reality of our times. For today, when innovative technologies have created or permitted orbiting satellites that can be destroyed from hundreds of kilometres away, genetic manipulation and surrogate motherhood, cluster bombs and distance or targeted killing, to use jargon that has become banal, the shameful reality is that millions of children are dying simply because they are hungry or because they lack treatment for non-lethal illnesses for which we have cures. Others die during childbirth or are destined for a future without prospects. If by chance they survive, they will end up living in the slums that surround our cities or in refugee camps or they will take their chances on some makeshift craft lured by the mirage of illegal immigration. Their futures are predetermined. Hope is a meaningless word for the members of this generation, who are headed for violence and a precarious life without a future, a life that is marked out for an early death.

How long will we be able to live with that reality? What does development mean when seen through the prism of abject poverty? Of course we are all making efforts. Of course we have the MDGs. But do we thereby inspire conviction or do we create uncertainty? We all have at our disposal figures, which each of us can verify in the reports disseminated throughout the world. But who can tell us once and for all how to put an end to child hunger and malnutrition, the death that permeates all our undertakings, given that we are living in a system that disregards the majority, perpetuates terrifying injustice and ensures that as a society evolves and makes growth its guiding principle, the number of poor people increases somewhere? Should growth be based on the perpetuation of poverty? The imbalances are too glaring to be ignored. How can we invest billions of dollars in endless wars when a mere portion of that astronomical amount would reduce poverty, end extreme poverty, vanquish the illnesses that afflict the poorest countries and save millions of children from certain death? And that is to say nothing of the challenges posed by climate change, which could be addressed more effectively.

Interdependence is the reality of today. We live in a multipolar globalized world. It is therefore by definition an interdependent world. Obvious imbalances of course exist but, along the way, each one of us will defend interests and benefits which will also be the interests of all and represent benefits for all. Interdependence is the nexus between North-South relations and South-South cooperation. It is where public and private spheres come together to nurture development projects. However, interdependence must also mean equal opportunity, access to financing, debt reduction, technology transfers and the continuation of assistance to those in need. We are here at the United Nations as both stakeholders in and promoters of interdependence. All Members should assume their responsibilities in that regard and proceed to building peace, facilitating exchanges in a spirit of solidarity and effectively participating in the search for peace, for the future of the planet requires it.

Is there life after the MDGs? We want to believe that there is. For if we want to end hunger and poverty and war and violence, we must all work to maintain political will, to continue partnership in a spirit of

solidarity and to strengthen interdependence, for the challenges confronting the planet in this century defy our imagination and our intelligence. I know that together we can succeed, for this is about the future of the world and of humankind.

Mr. Kim Hyun Chong (Republic of Korea): Midway to the target year of 2015 set for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), my delegation believes that the thematic debate that we are having today could not be more timely and helpful in reinvigorating our efforts to achieve those noble Goals. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express my warmest appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this important meeting.

During our discussion, it has been noted that, while significant progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs, such progress has been uneven and slow among regions. As the President mentioned in his opening statement, however, we could emerge victorious and meet most, if not all, of the MDGs by 2015, if we take urgent action with more commitment and dedication. Without a doubt, global partnership will be an essential framework to drive us towards the Goals. It will be equally important for developing countries to make further efforts to align their national development strategies and priorities with the MDGs.

The balance sheet at the midpoint shows that progress towards achieving the goal of halving the proportion of people who suffer from extreme poverty and hunger has been uneven from region to region. While the ratio of extreme poverty decreased from 28 per cent in 1990 to 19 per cent in 2005, particular concern has been raised with regard to some regions, such as Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, which have lagged behind in attaining the goal. Efforts to alleviate the suffering of extreme poverty should be redoubled in those regions.

With population growth, many more millions of people are faced with the danger of being relegated to poverty again. Malnutrition also remains a serious problem. Most disheartenigly, 143 million children under the age of five in the developing world continue to suffer from inadequate nutrition. Such malnutrition of children is particularly alarming because it could lead to a succession of poverty from generation to generation.

In addition, recent unprecedented price hikes for basic food and energy add more complexity to attaining the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger. As is well known, the World Food Programme recently issued an extraordinary emergency appeal, amounting to $500 million, to address the critical funding gap created by soaring food and fuel prices. Urgent scaling up of financial resources will be essential to counter these emerging challenges.

In accordance with the pledge made at the 2005 World Summit, the Republic of Korea is in the process of substantially increasing our official development assistance (ODA). My delegation also believes that innovative sources of financing for development could be very important supplementary resources for development cooperation. In that connection, last year the Korean Government introduced an air ticket solidarity levy. The funds raised by the levy will be used to fight poverty and epidemic diseases in least developed countries, in particular in the African region. In that regard, my delegation believes that the issue of innovative sources of development finance should be duly discussed at the relevant forums, including the forthcoming Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development, to be held late this year.

Well-educated human resources are crucial for national development. Education is also essential in ensuring human dignity and the basic rights of the individual. Achieving universal primary education is therefore not only an issue of development but also closely related to the promotion of basic human rights. Education has played a pivotal role in promoting and sustaining my country's economic growth. According to the lessons we have learned, education is also a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development and building a more stable and democratic society.

The Korean Government is fully aware of the importance of education. It has therefore given high priority to the provision of education in our development cooperation policy. About 60 per cent of our ODA has been directed to programmes aimed at developing social capital. My Government invites several hundred trainees every year from developing countries and dispatches experts with various skills abroad for cooperation in the fields of capacity development.

Gender equality in education is another critical element for achieving the MDGs. Even though the

gender parity goal set for 2005 has been missed, I note that 118 out of the 188 countries with available data are on track to achieve, or have already achieved, gender parity at the primary level. We need to do more to achieve gender equality in education, because it is unthinkable to promote the MDGs without the full participation of women in the development process.

The Republic of Korea welcomes the various initiatives at the global and regional levels to eradicate epidemic diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Far too many human lives, especially among the younger generations, are lost to epidemic diseases. Beyond their terrible toll in human lives, those diseases also undermine the development efforts of the international community. As an effort to contribute in this area, my Government is also participating in the activities of the International Drug Purchase Facility, which was established to support the fight against the three major diseases of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

It is encouraging to note that progress in fighting epidemic diseases has been supported by a substantial increase in donations by international actors. While more resources are still required, my delegation shares the view that we need to ensure coordination and cooperation among various actors in this area to avoid fragmentation, inefficiency and duplication.

The eight Millennium Development Goals are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. An integrated and multifaceted approach should be employed to achieve MDGs by 2015. In that regard, my delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that progress can only be achieved if all actors are energized.

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate the strong commitment and willingness of my Government to make the utmost effort to achieve the MDGs.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In reviewing the progress made at the halfway point towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we sincerely recognize the positive results recorded in many aspects of life throughout the world that have brought about improved livelihoods for millions of people, as reported in the related discussion materials for this meeting. However, a closer look and more careful analysis of the challenges ahead of us, particularly those contained in background papers on poverty and hunger and health and education, reminds us that much more remains to be done, and greater efforts must be made, if our promise to accomplish the eight MDGs by 2015 is to be kept. That also applies to the case of Viet Nam.

Following the adoption of the 2000 Millennium Declaration, with a high sense of responsibility, Viet Nam adapted the eight MDGs into 12 Viet Nam-specific development goals to be achieved by 2010. Those goals are focused on social issues and the elimination of poverty, and the entire nation has made an all-out effort to achieve them. Our poverty rate has been reduced sharply: from 58.1 per cent in 1993 to 24.1 per cent 2004 and 14.7 per cent in 2007. That has allowed our country to attain MDG 1 far ahead of schedule.

With regard to education, currently more than 99 per cent of Viet Nam's six-year-old children attend primary school. We are therefore confident that Viet Nam will achieve MDG 2 between 2010 and 2015.

With regard to gender equality and an improved status for women, the gender gap has been noticeably and significantly narrowed at all levels of education, with female students now comprising at least 46.8 per cent of enrolment. Women also have an enhanced role in the employment market, including in all areas of activity.

Viet Nam remains the leader in Asia in terms of female parliamentarian membership. It is therefore likely that Viet Nam will fundamentally achieve MDG 3 before 2015.

In the field of health, by 2007, Viet Nam had succeeded in reducing the rates of maternal mortality to 80 per 100,000. We have also reduced under-five mortality to 27.5 per 1,000 and the under-one mortality rate to 16 per 1,000. Having reduced 4.5-fold malaria morbidity and 9-fold malaria mortality during the period from 1995 to 2004, Viet Nam can now claim to have relatively effectively controlled this disease. With that in mind, we have reason to be optimistic with regard to achieving most of the requirements set for Goals 4, 5 and 6. However, the current rapid spread and complicated development of HIV/AIDS, which has resulted in increasing numbers of HIV/AIDS carriers, and — more seriously — the continued trend of

HIV/AIDS complications now put us at risk of failing to meet Goal 6.

We are heartened to report that Viet Nam has also scored positive gains in our efforts to ensure environmental sustainability, through, inter alia, increasing forest land coverage by 0.6 per cent annually, so that it now accounts for 39 per cent of the national land area; striving to conserve 11.6 per cent of natural land area by 2010; doubling the rate of access to clean water supply by the rural population; and raising the rate of urban waste collection to around 71 per cent.

With regard to the establishment of a global partnership for development, in accordance with our foreign policy of openness and proactive international integration, we have done our best to reach out to the world; improve our policies and legal systems; further attract and better use external resources; closely cooperate with foreign partners in designing and realizing strategies on employment for young people; provide low-cost essential medicines for the population; and intensify cooperation with the private sector to make full use of new technologies, particularly information and communications technologies. All of that testifies to the consistency of our foreign policy and the practice of Viet Nam being a friend and reliable partner of all countries in the international community, actively participating in international and regional cooperation.

On the way to 2015, bearing in mind the MDGs and their challenges as well as the need to have economic growth and social equity go hand in hand, the Vietnamese Government will continue with its pro-poor policy and strive for a more organic linkage between its poverty reduction strategy and sociopolitical development strategy and thus a more secure life for the population. To that end, Viet Nam counts on continued and greater cooperation and support from the international community, so that by 2015 we can join other Member States in celebrating the accomplishment of the eight MDGs. We support the joint declaration of 31 June 2007 by the Secretary-General and the British Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Gordon Brown, calling for an accelerated implementation of the MDGs.

We also hope that developed countries will fully implement their commitment to facilitating trade, allocating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance, reducing and writing off debts for developing countries and transferring technology to the latter. In that connection, we strongly support the work of the United Nations in building a road map, followed by substantive steps, towards the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha at the end of 2008. Viet Nam stands ready to contribute constructively to that process.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Government of Belarus is firmly committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We clearly understand how to ensure prompt achievement of the MDGs in Belarus. One of the major factors in the success of our work is the fact that we have integrated the MDGs into State socio-economic development programmes. A systemic and consistent national approach to achieving the MDGs is yielding, even now, encouraging results. In the last six years, the number of people with an income under the basic minimum has decreased fourfold in our country. We have paid particular attention to creating new jobs and decreasing the unemployment rate, which is now at only 1 per cent of the working population. We see good progress in education. The percentage of women receiving primary, secondary and higher education is even higher than the percentage of men. We have achieved significant progress in combating disease and child mortality. Since 1990, infant mortality has been halved. The infant mortality rate in Belarus is the lowest among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and our maternal mortality rate is the same as that of developed countries.

In our work to achieve the MDGs, Belarus appreciates the invaluable support of the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, first and foremost in overcoming the lingering consequences of one of the greatest technological tragedies in the history of mankind: Chernobyl.

Moreover, as a middle-income country, Belarus largely relies on its own strengths. We are well aware of the limited volume of financial resources allocated for development. In our view, a significant increase in the volume of those resources, first and foremost for those countries needing them the most, could only partially be the result of a collective encouragement or incentive. We believe that an important factor in such

growth is for Member States with special historical conditions that put them in a more privileged position to reach a critical mass of goodwill and empathy for the problems of those who, to a large extent, need the international community's assistance. That is what limits the opportunities for the United Nations to stimulate such positive processes.

However, the Organization's options are far from exhausted in terms of promoting, consistent with Charter principles, the rejection of politically motivated pressure and unilateral economic coercion in relations between States. While the majority of speakers in this debate have talked about looking for new opportunities and potential to strengthen support for national efforts to meet the MDGs, my country today is concerned with the harm already done to the MDG process by the unilateral economic sanctions introduced against Belarus by one Member State.

The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council regularly adopt resolutions calling on States to lift export subsidies, politically motivated unilateral sanctions and other measures hindering economic growth in developing countries. Today we have the right to state that, as one of the many items on the agenda of the General Assembly, this problem is becoming a serious factor hampering the achievement of the MDGs. Therefore, in our view, the Secretary-General, as the chief administrative officer of the Organization, has a mandate entitling him to actively speak out against the unfairly restricted access of products to the markets of developed countries, unilateral politically motivated sanctions and other measures hindering economic growth.

Today we have all the justification we need to more vigorously present the position of the United Nations on this issue to States adopting such measures and to make efforts to get them lifted, including during meetings with representatives of such States. We believe that in the country and regional programmes of the UNDP and other specialized agencies, we need to contemplate measures to provide programme countries with the technical and other assistance they need to minimize the impact of such unfairly restricted access of their products to the markets of developed countries, of politically motivated unilateral sanctions and other measures that hinder economic growth in developing countries. That type of assistance, among other things, could involve expertise and recommendations for a more appropriate and effective response by countries to measures hindering their economic growth and for adapting to such measures and minimizing their negative consequences.

We see serious potential in such steps, along with an important role for the United Nations system in providing a just environment for multilateral partnerships in the interest of development and in guaranteeing our common success in achieving the MDGs.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by thanking President Kerim for convening this timely debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico, on behalf of the Rio Group. In addition, we would like to make some comments from our national perspective.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are based on the commitment to promote a world association for development, a covenant between the poor countries, which commit to reducing poverty, and the richer world, which agrees to shoulder the responsibility of being an active partner in support of the initiatives of the developing countries. The MDGs are a set of internationally agreed objectives that can be reached if all those concerned work together and we each do our part.

Originating with the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs are now playing a central role both within the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and in civil society as benchmarks for measuring the efforts made at various levels to combat poverty. The Secretary-General has indicated that for the first time in its history humanity has the resources, knowledge and capacity to eradicate poverty, and he has urged us to maintain and enhance the momentum generated by the Millennium Declaration. Now that we are halfway towards the 2015 deadline, it is clear that remarkable progress has been achieved in many areas.

However, there is still a great deal to be done. Every country participating in this global commitment has, in conjunction with the international bodies, adapted the international goals to its own social and political situation. Goals, targets and indicators have been redefined and established at the national level, so that States can achieve the MDGs.

In Argentina, the promotion of decent work has also been incorporated as a goal, since studies and analysis have shown that unemployment, informal employment and under-utilization of the labour force are the principal underlying causes of the social crisis in Argentina. Furthermore, the studies also demonstrated that these phenomena are, to a large extent, responsible for Argentina's high rate of poverty and extreme poverty.

In my country, responsibility for following up on the MDGs has been assigned to the National Council of Social Policy Coordination which directly depends on the presidency.

Argentina, like other middle-income countries, is characterized by, among other things, deficit-related internal imbalances and structural vulnerabilities, which are made worse by the inequities of the international system.

Argentina is a federal State consisting of 23 provinces and the autonomous city of Buenos Aires. This makes for a mosaic of situations and functions with varying human development results. There are regions in our country where there is a high human development level and other regions whose human development level is akin to what you might find in the poorest countries of Latin America. Given the federal nature of the State, several provinces decided to define their own goals and elaborate their own performance indicators. The country has made progress towards the MDGs. However, despite some encouraging results, we note from the indicators diverse performances across provinces and regions. We must therefore craft strategies that are consistent with national plans and programmes and provide better public service.

In all areas of public policy, our actions systematically refer to the MDGs. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that quantitative indices that measure achievement of the Goals are not sufficient, since inequality cuts across all sectors and dimensions of development. This is why issues such as human rights and the gender perspective cut across all the Goals. Only if they are successfully integrated will we achieve equity for all.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the words spoken by the President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, when she took office and addressed the Legislative Assembly:

> "We must each ask ourselves what, over and above our duties as citizens, we can do every day to be a little better and thus live in a better country. This does not imply a diminution of responsibility; rather, it means that everyone should assume his or her share of responsibility for building a different society. But institutions and society will only acknowledge each other when they are successful in improving the quality of life of the people."

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to President Kerim for organizing this important debate on progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs have been a powerful mobilizing force for focusing global and national action on improvement of the well-being of people around the world. This meeting provides the opportunity to review and discuss the implementation of the MDGs and to pave the way for a successful convening of the high-level meeting on the MDGs in September 2008. In my remarks today, I would like to share Afghanistan's experience towards fulfilling the MDGs.

In 2000, when the Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration and committed themselves to endorsing the MDGs in a time-bound manner, Afghanistan was embroiled in armed conflict. In March 2004, my Government committed itself to achieving the MDGs within a time-bound period. As a late entrant to global development efforts, the Afghan Government has extended its MDGs timeline from 2015 to 2020 due to a quarter of a century of conflict and our inability to join this global effort in 2000.

Lack of available data has posed unique problems as regards reliable baselines from which to set targets. Therefore most of the global targets have been "afghanized", which means that they have been revised to make them more relevant to Afghanistan. Moreover, in recognition of the interdependency of development and security, a ninth goal of "enhancing security" has been added to the MDGs.

The development policy framework of Afghanistan, which was established at the London Conference in January 2006, is aimed at enabling the MDGs to be achieved. At the London Conference, we launched our National MDGs Report, presented our

Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) and adopted the Afghanistan Compact.

Notwithstanding the progress made towards the MDGs, many challenges still remain in the implementation of our goals. Allow me to highlight some of them.

With regard to Goal 1, related to poverty and hunger, since 2001 economic growth has not only been significant, but has also generated better livelihoods; gross domestic product per capita has increased 53 per cent over the past five years. However, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated 22 million Afghans — representing 70 per cent of the population — living in poverty; the figure is especially high in rural areas. Poverty and unemployment, both of which have contributed to the increase in terrorist activities in the country, could jeopardize the gains made over the past six years. We have accorded priority to addressing both in a sustainable and timely manner.

Regarding Goal 2, related to education, since 2001 nearly 7 million children — one third of whom are girls — have returned to schools. More than 3,500 schools have been built, and new curricula and textbooks have been developed for primary education. In addition, the number of teachers has increased sevenfold. However, a great number of children, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to face difficulties in gaining access to educational institutions. It is also important to mention the fact that the Taliban and Al-Qaida, during their campaign of terror, have attacked and intimidated teachers and students and have burned a large number of schools.

Concerning Goal 3, related to gender, significant progress has been achieved in empowering women in the political, economic and social areas. Women play an important role in the development and peace process in Afghanistan. However, many women still face obstacles. Among them are low rates of literacy and life expectancy, together with pregnancy-related complications, unemployment and insufficient access to education and health services.

As for Goals 4, 5 and 6 — to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, respectively — today, 81 per cent of the Afghan population has access to basic health services, and access to diagnostic and curative services has increased from almost none in 2002 to more than 40 per cent. The infant and maternal mortality rates have been reduced by 85,000 and 40,000 annually, respectively. We created our National HIV/AIDS Control Programme in 2004 to collect systematic data on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. However, close to 900 children under the age of 5 die daily, and more than 60 women die every day from pregnancy-related complications. Malaria is prevalent in more than 60 per cent of the country, and Afghanistan has the twelfth-largest tuberculosis burden in the world and the largest in South Asia.

Concerning Goal 7, related to the environment, in 2007 343 community water points were constructed in the parts of southern Afghanistan hit by drought and affected by conflict. The Government of Afghanistan has taken numerous initiatives to prevent environmental degradation. However, only 23 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and most of the diseases afflicting the population are caused by a lack of drinkable water.

Regarding Afghanistan's own goal 9, related to security, the lack of security caused by the Taliban and Al-Qaida in the southern parts of Afghanistan is a major obstacle to economic and social development. The achievement of our MDGs depends solely on the provision of security for our people. Afghanistan has added this new goal, which includes targets related to disarmament, demining and counter-narcotics. We would like to place emphasis on the need to provide technical and financial assistance to our security institutions in order to contribute to the rule of law and advance the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process and counter-narcotics efforts.

A major portion of Afghanistan's national development resources is currently being provided by the international community. Therefore, our partnership with the donor community is key to ensuring the implementation of our National Development Strategy, including the MDGs. In that regard, it is important to mention the following constraints on the delivery of aid to Afghanistan and on efforts to ensure its effectiveness.

First, in overall terms, the volume of aid delivered to Afghanistan is lower than that delivered to other post-conflict settings. Secondly, there is a growing gap of billions of dollars between amounts pledged and amounts disbursed, which undermines the ability of our Government to undertake long-term

fiscal planning. Thirdly, nearly three quarters of this aid is disbursed outside the scope of our national budget, which creates a parallel system that undermines our Government's ownership and involves multiple levels of contractors that inflate costs and fail to build Afghan national capacity. Fourthly, the proportion of tied aid is three times that of untied aid, which affects our capability to plan and effectively implement our National Development Strategy.

By adopting the Afghanistan Compact, the international community committed itself to improving aid effectiveness in Afghanistan and to providing resources and support for the implementation of our Development Strategy, including the MDGs. We would like to take this opportunity to remind the donor community to fulfil its commitments under the Afghanistan Compact and to do the following: first, increase the level of official development assistance, particularly to countries emerging from conflict; secondly, translate pledges into commitments and therefore undertake more predictable and multi-year funding commitments; thirdly, provide its financial support through our national budget in order to reduce duplication and transaction costs and to strengthen national ownership; and, fourthly, deliver untied aid whenever possible and provide assistance within the framework of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Afghanistan is currently at the crucial stage of finalizing its National Development Strategy and entering its implementation phase. The Strategy will be launched during the international conference on Afghanistan to be held in Paris in June 2008. The Paris conference represents an opportunity for our international partners to renew their political and financial commitment to the implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and to the achievement of our MDGs. We expect that, at the Paris conference, the international community will continue its political and financial support to Afghanistan so that we can improve the lives of our people and stand on our own feet.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): A famous French writer once said that a goal without a plan is just a wish. Today, halfway through our 15-year quest to realize the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and faced with the possibility that we are not on track to achieve the Goals, we must ask ourselves a fundamental question: are the MDGs indeed goals, or are they simply an exercise in wishful thinking on a global scale? If the international community is serious and committed to achieving the MDGs by 2015, we must demonstrate the political courage to tackle the structural changes necessary to allow for meaningful global development.

This thematic debate cannot be an occasion for either international hand-wringing or international back-slapping. The twin outcomes of this debate must be a concrete multilateral plan for progress and an agreement on the areas of focus going forward.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is justifiably proud of its recent progress towards achieving and surpassing the MDGs. In the field of education, we have achieved universal access to both primary and secondary schools. Indeed, between 2001 and 2006, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines went from having only 39 per cent of its eligible children attending secondary schools to achieving universal access to secondary education. We are implementing a many-sided poverty reduction strategy that includes policies to stimulate growth, trade and development, increase employment opportunities, invest in human capital and improve social and physical infrastructure.

On the health front, infant mortality continues its downward trend, and we are on track to meet our 2015 target. A multifaceted wellness revolution is under way to combat a host of preventable lifestyle diseases, and the Government has also instituted comprehensive programmes to combat HIV/AIDS, although the challenges posed by that deadly disease remain daunting.

But the successes and challenges of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, much like those of our sister States throughout the developing world, cannot be viewed in the context of individual national plans and discrete examples of progress or failure. In our progress towards the MDGs, we have reached the point where future plans for their achievement must take on global and structural dimensions. Developing countries, with very few exceptions, have worked assiduously and in relative isolation towards their MDG targets. The uneven progress to date has shown the limitations of those disjointed, individual approaches.

In that regard, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wholeheartedly echoes the calls made yesterday by India, Jamaica, Morocco, Pakistan, the Group of 77 and many others for an emphasis on the critical

importance of Goal 8 — develop a global partnership for development. That neglected and unappreciated Goal is indeed a prerequisite for and the fulcrum of meaningful development.

Six years ago, very early in the MDG process, world leaders gathered in Monterrey and stated:

> "Our goal is to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system". (*A/CONF.198/11, resolution 1, para. 1*)

Part and parcel of that noble goal was a renewal of developed States' long-standing pledge to give 0.7 per cent of their gross national product as official development assistance. Today, we are no closer to that modest assistance target, which was first mooted in 1969, before the challenges of climate change, the digital divide or the special development issues of the post-cold-war and post-9/11 world.

Our global partnership for development has thus far failed to extend to the realm of substantive and far-reaching forgiveness of debts that have been paid many times over. Nor has it fashioned ways in which a debtor nation can satisfy its obligations to creditors by reallocating its debt-servicing dollars towards mutually agreed domestic development projects. Furthermore, our global partnership has yet to meaningfully tackle the imposition of trade-distorting barriers and subsidies, which short-sightedly serve the gods of local political expediency.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines urges renewed consideration and emphasis on Goal 8, not in the context of welfare colonialism or conditionality, but in a manner that empowers developing States and dismantles the mechanisms of underdevelopment. The developing world is not underdeveloped because we were waiting for the United Nations to enumerate eight MDGs for our collective benefit; we are underdeveloped because of a complex structural process and norms that reinforce systemic inequalities. It is impossible to meaningfully address development without having the political courage to tackle those structural biases.

Achievement of the MDGs has become a Holy Grail at the United Nations, even though the Goals themselves, while vital, are minimal benchmarks that will not close the yawning development gap between core and peripheral States. Indeed, as the developing world has moved haltingly towards the MDGs, our developed partners have consolidated their advantages in terms of health, wealth, education, technology and productivity.

For example, no one in this Hall can seriously suggest that a primary education or mere literacy can be the basis upon which States' populations compete in a globalized economy. Without universal secondary and widespread tertiary education, and without technological and information literacy, developing States will continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water and will remain trapped in entrenched inequality. The MDGs are therefore not final goals, but merely an essential first step in attaining the minimal basis for meaningful development. In that regard, we must begin to envisage the next 15 years of development goals, even as we wrestle with our current targets.

We in the United Nations cannot simply speak the MDGs into existence; our words must be accompanied by action. Our endless graphs, charts and MDG projections must result in paradigm-altering structural adjustments in trade, assistance and cooperation. With all the ink, paper and words that have been expended on the MDGs, we must collectively accept their achievement as a measure of the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations in tackling global ills. The last steps towards realizing the MDGs cannot be taken merely on an ad hoc basis by States acting individually. We must have the vision to plan, and the courage to act, in a manner that fulfils our moral, ethical and human obligations to our fellow citizens.

Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this thematic debate, especially at a time when we have arrived at the midpoint for achieving the time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I would like to begin by associating my national statement with the statements delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries and by the representative of Tonga on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States.

For many vulnerable countries, the emphasis on achieving the MDGs has been overwhelming, so much so that discussions have sidelined the special situations

of the least developed countries, the landlocked developing countries and the small island developing States. Unfortunately, the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries and the Barbados Programme of Action — which are supposed to be vehicles for the least advantaged to attain the MDGs — have been sidelined, not having been included in either regional or international country programmes to address their specific challenges. My delegation supports the call made by Barbados for the international community to support the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Brussels Programme of Action for the least developed countries.

Solomon Islands remains off track to achieve the MDGs and is a country that is also emerging from a conflict situation. Many of the issues faced by small island countries are considered too small for the international system to handle; hence, those issues get swept under the carpet. To some extent, we have become invisible in the debate, in which we are seen but never mentioned in any of the discussions. None of the panellists referred to our subregion. Viewed in that light, this statement is about our quest for survival. Here, I would like to acknowledge the presidency's initiative to hold a special meeting for the most vulnerable and to express the hope that in future, we can be featured in the discussion.

The impact of climate change has increased poverty and requires new and additional resources. Droughts, flooding, sea-level rise and the frequency of cyclones continue to batter our narrow-based agricultural economies, reversing developments achieved over decades — within minutes in the case of tsunamis, and within hours in the case of cyclones. Although least developed countries and small island developing States are those least equipped to deal with climate change, it is stated too many times that, when it comes to action, we fail to honour our commitments. These developments have made it even more challenging for us to achieve the MDGs. The movement of people from low-lying islands to larger islands is already happening to various degrees across the country. A state of emergency has been declared in various parts of Solomon Islands, owing to food shortages resulting from natural calamities.

The high cost of food and the increased price of energy speak of the dilemma faced by least developed countries, which live on the fringes of the international system.

With regard to the issue of financing for development, it is important that we begin to look at some quick wins. For many of the small island developing States of the Pacific, energy accounts for a third of our national budgets. Securing adequate technology is a must to free up domestic resources to address all the MDGs. The valuing of forests for carbon credit purposes is a means of halting the unsustainable harvesting of forests, but it is also a means of providing alternative income for the population, as nearly 80 per cent of the land in Solomon Islands is customarily owned. In the health sector, treated bed nets save lives. That is especially important given that malaria remains the number-one killer in Solomon Islands. Moreover, HIV/AIDS is a time bomb for our young population.

Secondly, if we are to get back on track, there must be a change in approach by the United Nations system-wide. The United Nations must move from policy to developing on-the-ground activities. The usual practice of blaming policies and governance has gone on for so long that countries have become very open and flexible in accessing funds from partners. In most cases, that is done at the expense of focusing on national policies. There is a tendency to focus too much on the formal sector and to neglect the informal sector.

Thirdly, we must strengthen the linkage between the United Nations and its Member States. In that spirit, we need to look at situations in countries where there is no — or limited — United Nations presence and at what can be done, especially to facilitate North-South and South-South cooperation. Not to do so will create weak links within our global fight to eradicate poverty. Our multilateral system must take a more pragmatic and concrete approach to address the structural impediments that continue to marginalize poor countries from the international economic, financial and trade systems. There must be genuine change in the international financial and trade architecture to include least developed countries and small island developing States, especially in the agricultural sector. There is also a need to ensure inclusiveness and equal attention in reviewing all eight MDGs. In that connection, in terms of looking at all the MDGs in a holistic manner, my delegation would

once again like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of India.

Fourthly, in connection with the panel discussion on poverty eradication, health and education, all those sectors need resources. My delegation acknowledges the support of our developed partners. However, sustainability in those sectors will require decisive public investment in resources directed at creating people-centred economic opportunities in the productive sectors of the economy. This issue is about partnership, and Goal 8 provides for it. We should discuss how we are going to sustain all Goals. That can only be done by doing more for trade than aid and by ensuring that Doha delivers and creates a just and fair international financial system.

There is also a need to address the issue of debt and to convert debts into MDG and Brussels Programme of Action projects, in addition to the energy and forestry proposals to which I referred earlier. In that connection, my delegation once again supports the call by the Philippines for the United Nations to seriously look at the debt equity concept for MDGs, especially in freeing up resources for sustainable development.

In conclusion, the success of the time-bound MDGs depends upon the degree to which we honour and operationalize our global commitment in all respects. The MDGs are about development, freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in human dignity.

Mrs. Gallardo Hernández (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this thematic debate of the General Assembly, during which we have identified the achievements and challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

El Salvador has shouldered its political responsibility by structuring its national development plan to comprehensively comply with the Goals. We believe that building a more equitable society entails promoting social investment as a national priority, as well as the search for innovative multilateral financial mechanisms.

El Salvador believes that the multidimensional phenomenon of poverty is defined as a shortfall in income and a lack of access to education, health services and basic infrastructure services such as water, basic sanitation, electricity and rural roads. Likewise, poverty includes the lack of economic and social opportunities. As a result, my country has taken a series of steps aimed at achieving sustained economic growth, with social policies involving heavy investment in our people, while at the same time strengthening institutions through national consensus in order to lay the foundation for a more just society.

This is about an important political decision taken by my Government that has been implemented through efforts focused on areas where we can have the greatest impact on people living in extreme poverty. The main goal is to establish a safety net for the poorest and most marginalized of our people in order to close the gap between urban and rural areas. That commitment by the Government of El Salvador is reflected in the social plan known as Opportunidades, which entails a series of projects to serve the most vulnerable people in rural areas.

I should also mention our health solidarity fund, which strengthens and expands medical services; the Conéctate education programme, which sets up information and communication technology centres; the Jóvenes programme, which generates greater opportunities for the development, participation and comprehensive advancement of young people; and the Tu Crédito programme for seeking financial support. Likewise, I should also mention that through our solidarity network and a comprehensive policy that addresses education, health, nutrition and other basic services, the Government is providing support to families living in extreme poverty in rural areas.

In meeting its commitment, El Salvador has succeeded in reducing the rate of extreme poverty from 32.6 per cent to 12.5 per cent. The goal for 2015 was 16.3 per cent.

With regard to the goal on malnutrition, although we have succeeded in reducing its impact, we are nevertheless aware of the fact that this is one area in which we must step up our efforts in order to meet the goal by 2015. In particular, we must do so by reducing the number of malnourished children.

Our 2021 national education plan includes various initiatives, such as the Edúcame programme, which aims at facilitating basic and intermediate education through flexible schedules. Basic education

is provided through our educational networks, while our Juega Leyendo programme is devoted to universal preschool education. The Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programme has made it possible to make important progress in the area of adult literacy. All of this leads me to underscore the fact that El Salvador's education MDG indicators have improved substantially, having reached the 73 per cent mark. We genuinely hope to reach 100 per cent by 2015. Access to education is currently at a satisfactory level of gender balance.

In the area of health, our Ministry of Public Health has undertaken major programmes. The national family health plan guarantees access and equality services, in the provision of thus providing better primary health care. This improvement was possible thanks to a sharing of responsibility between families and local government. There has also been a reduction of the maternal mortality rate, from 173 per 100,000 live births to 55.3 in 2007. Infant mortality rates fell to 23.4 per 1,000 live births in 2006. We have increased vaccinations of minors and hope to be able to meet this goal as well by 2015.

The Government of El Salvador has decisively committed itself to combating HIV/AIDS. Through the network set up by the Ministry of Health, antiretroviral therapy has increased since 2001 and is provided to approximately 62 per cent of declared cases. El Salvador is doing everything it can in this effort, by actively participating in the Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

My country shares the view that in order to attain the MDGs towards the sustainable development of a country, we must take national and international elements into consideration. Solidarity of Governments is required and must be translated into balanced and equitable international cooperation. We know that for some countries, conditions are not favourable to achieving the MDGs by 2015. That is why it is extremely important that responsibility be shared and shouldered at the national level. While we recognize the significant contribution of developed countries, we must recall the need to continue increasing development assistance.

The search for this balance involves negotiating processes such as the Monterrey Consensus, with which we are currently very busy. We must also point out certain realities that have transformed development processes. We are referring in particular to the situation of middle-income countries. While this represents progress in national terms towards achieving the MDGs, it does not mean that development cooperation should be reduced.

The El Salvador Consensus on cooperation for the development of middle-income countries, the outcome of a conference my country hosted in October 2007, sets out the international community's commitment to achieving these internationally agreed development goals.

El Salvador reaffirms its continued commitment to be a partner in this joint reflection that President Kerim has convened. We believe that this debate will offer inspiration to the meeting of heads of State or Government to be held in September.

Mr. Raytchev (Bulgaria): At the outset, allow me to thank General Assembly President Kerim for organizing this extremely important meeting on the crucial midpoint in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Bulgaria fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. In my remarks today, I would like to elaborate on some important elements from a national perspective.

In the years since 2000, when the Millennium Declaration was endorsed, we have seen progress in achieving the MDGs even in those regions where the challenges are greatest. For example, the number of extremely poor people in sub-Saharan Africa has levelled off, and the poverty rate has declined by nearly six percentage points since 2000.

At the global level, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from nearly a third to less than one fifth between 1990 and 2004; enrolment in primary education grew from 80 per cent in 1991 to 88 per cent in 2000; child mortality rates have declined; and key interventions to control malaria and tuberculosis have been expanded.

These results are truly remarkable and important. However, they are still partial, and much more remains to be done. At present, only one of the eight regional groups cited in the MDG report is on track to achieve all the Goals. At the current rates of progress, the target of reducing by half the proportion of underweight

children will be missed, with approximately 30 million children still remaining at risk. Furthermore, the target of reducing the number of people who lack basic sanitation will fall short by almost 600 million people. In addition, new challenges — in particular, climate change, with its projected enormous economic and social impact — are expected to further impede progress towards the MDGs.

These estimates make it clear that the efforts to implement the MDGs should be drastically accelerated and in a coherent and coordinated manner. Therefore, all of us — developed and developing countries alike, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the private sector — need to work harder. Only coordinated and sustained efforts until 2015 will bring success. In this regard, every effort counts and every contribution matters.

I am glad to report here that Bulgaria too is striving to contribute, within its capacities, to the world's effort to eradicate global poverty and hunger. Development cooperation is not new for my country. In mid-1980s the Republic of Bulgaria was already a donor to over 40 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the 1990s, regardless of the difficulties of our own political and economic transition, Bulgaria continued to participate in several initiatives, assisting countries in need.

My country supported the decisions of the major United Nations conferences on international development issues, including the Millennium Summit, and the decision of the European Council of June 2005. We are committed to striving to achieve the targets of 0.17 per cent of gross national income (GNI) allocated for official development assistance by 2010 and 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2015. Our concept paper on the policy of the Republic of Bulgaria for participation in international development cooperation, adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2007, has clearly stated our firm resolve to live up to these commitments. We are in the process of rebuilding, slowly but steadily, our national donor capacity, and we stand ready to share our experience with other countries undergoing a similar transition.

The eradication of poverty in all its dimensions and manifestations is the main objective of Bulgaria's development cooperation policy. Also among the sectoral priorities of our development assistance efforts are education; the implementation of health care reforms; the provision of assistance in socio-economic transition; development of infrastructure; environmental protection; security and post-conflict reconstruction; and the preservation of cultural diversity.

We also believe that improving the quality of aid is no less important for achieving the MDGs than increasing its volume. Thus, our development policy fully embraces the principles of ownership, alignment, accountability, coordination, complementarity and coherence laid down in the European Consensus on Development and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

We are closely following the preparations for the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to be held in Accra, and stand ready to actively participate in the conference and to reflect its outcome in our development policy documents and practice.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once again what has been stated here by many other colleagues before me: what we need in order to get back on track in achieving the MDGs are practical results. Failure to secure them could be fatal for the credibility of the international community and the United Nations, as its most representative and universal instrument. We cannot and should not allow this to happen.

Mr. Sow (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bangladesh on behalf, respectively, of the Group of 77 and China, the Group of African States and the least developed countries.

The midpoint towards 2015 is an opportune moment for my country to critically examine the road travelled and to assess the immense efforts still needed in order to achieve the first two Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Generally speaking, the facts set out in our two initial national reports on the MDGs, which Guinea adopted in 2002 and 2005, reflect mixed results. In real terms, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was 1.2 per cent in 2003 and 2.7 per cent in 2004, while the average annual growth rate of the population was estimated at 3.1 per cent. According to official

estimates, per capita GDP has decreased from $379 in 2002 to $332 in 2006. Furthermore, as inflation has increased to a worrying degree, each year, rising from 6.1 per cent in 2002 to 39.1 per cent in 2006, purchasing power has weakened. This, in turn, increases inequality and has put the percentage of people living below the poverty line at 53.6 in 2005, compared to 49 per cent in 2002.

The prevalence of underweight — that is, chronic malnutrition — in children under 5 has decreased from 23 per cent to 20 per cent, while that of emaciation, or acute malnutrition, has regressed, from 9 per cent to 11.2 per cent.

If the macroeconomic trends of recent years persist and if the worsening of poverty is not brought under control, Guinea will not be able to achieve the target for the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty.

Nevertheless, important progress has been made in the field of education. Overall primary school enrolment increased by 16 percentage points in 2001, from 62 per cent to 78 per cent; the primary education graduation rate, which was 27 per cent in 2000-2001, reached 60 per cent in 2005-2006. With the current trend, while there is a real hope of attaining 100 per cent primary school enrolment by 2015, primary education graduation rates will reach only 83.7 per cent by 2015.

Significant improvements have also been noted in respect to the elimination of gender disparities. Between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004, the ratio of girls to boys went from 72 per cent to 76 per cent at the primary school level and from 41 per cent to 45 per cent at the secondary level. If we keep up this pace, there is a chance to achieve gender equality by the deadline.

This troubling portrait is explained both by poor management of available resources and by the particularly limiting course of events that affected Guinea between 2000 and 2005. Faced with the drastic consequences of instability in our subregion, Guinea, which was already sheltering close to a million refugees, or almost one tenth of its population, had to struggle to neutralize repeated rebel attacks in 2000. The result was a serious deterioration of the macroeconomic situation of the country, along with the suspension of our programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the loss of momentum of the implementation of the national poverty reduction strategy.

This explains the social tensions which struck the country from March 2006 to February 2007, which ended with a new Government under the authority of the Prime Minister as head of Government. Stepped up governmental action to consolidate social peace and rebuild the foundations of good governance and our development process are true reasons for the people of Guinea to be hopeful.

Recently, therefore, a second poverty reduction strategy document was developed and adopted. It will serve as an MDG operationalization framework for Guinea for the period 2007-2010. In this context, the financing needed for the achievement of the MDGs is estimated to be $12.5 billion, or $1.39 billion per year for a period of nine years. This is an ambitious objective, but it is a challenge that, if met, would enable Guinea to reverse the current trend and set itself on the right path to achieving the MDGs by 2015.

Since its formation in 2007, the new Government has succeeded in relaunching the socio-political dialogue and restoring economic stability, including by improving the exchange rate of the Guinean franc, reducing inflation from 40 per cent to 18.8 per cent and renewing relations with international financial institutions, in particular the IMF. The signing of a formal agreement with the IMF opens the door of cooperation between Guinea and its development partners and provides for debt relief in the framework of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

The Guinean Government is working with laudable success to improve governance and the rule of law and to boldly combat corruption and mismanagement of public resources, while ensuring the effective functioning of development programmes. At the same time, we are hoping for strong mobilization on the part of our social and development partners with a view to lightening conditionalities and improving the coordination and coherence of interventions. We also hope for institutional and human capacity-building to reduce impediments to trade and to the competitiveness of the national economy, both at local and international levels.

In conclusion, on the behalf of the Republic of Guinea, I once again wish to convey our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly and to the

Secretary-General for the resolute and innovative action that they are carrying out to ensure on-time implementation of the MDGs throughout the world and especially in Africa.

Mr. Mac-Donald (Suriname): Let me express the appreciation of the Republic of Suriname to the President of the General Assembly for convening this very important thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the theme "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015".

At the outset, the delegation of Suriname wishes to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Suriname has committed itself to achieving the MDGs, as guiding principles for its development policies and programmes. The MDGs are therefore integrated in our national development policy framework, which also recognizes the need for building close partnerships with civil society and the private sector in order to attain sustainable economic and social development for our people.

However, aligning national policy and development programmes according to internationally established standards does not necessarily ensure the attainment of the MDGs by 2015. In each country conditions are different, and accomplishing internationally established goals and standards remains, therefore, a highly challenging task.

Achievement of the MDGs depends also on various crucial developments in the world, such as international peace and security, adequate and predictable official development assistance, debt relief and fair trade. MDGs require a collective approach at national, regional and international levels. In this regard, MDG 8 remains of critical importance in our endeavours.

While reports show that in Suriname significant progress has been made towards the achievement of MDG 2, universal primary education, MDG 4, reducing child mortality, and MDG 6, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, progress remains uneven in terms of MDG 1, the eradication of poverty, MDG 3, promoting gender equality, MDG 5, reducing maternal mortality, and MDG 7, ensuring environmental sustainability.

AIDS is the leading cause of death in Suriname in the 24 to 49 age group, with the feminization of the pandemic presenting increased challenges to our national response. Current efforts are focusing on implementing a multisector approach to HIV and reinforcing the coordination capacity of the national HIV/AIDS mechanisms. A national HIV council will be appointed later this year by the President, to convene an annual "State of the Epidemic" forum.

In our Health Sector Plan, the Government promotes an equitable society through, among other things, access to primary healthcare and services, including sexual and reproductive health, reducing the urban-rural health gap, reducing maternal and child mortality, and youth-friendly health services.

Despite our commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women — through, inter alia, ratification of the most comprehensive conventions in this area — we have to acknowledge that women still face challenges in the labour markets and are underrepresented at the highest levels of decision-making in the political society, which further limits their contribution to economic and social development. Therefore, the Government committed to emphasizing gender-based vulnerability and equality in its Integral Gender Action Plan.

The Government of Suriname considers education a priority and has identified it as one of the main pillars in eradicating poverty. The reduction of disparities related to gender, geographical location and socio-cultural background is a key concern of the Government. The multiannual development plan therefore makes specific linkages between effective governance practice and efficient public services as well as private sector development and eradicating poverty as a basis for sustainable human development and achievement of the MDGs.

Today, 3 April, Suriname will sign the Common Country Programme Action Plan for the period 2008-2011 with participating United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF. This Plan addresses the pursuit of the MDGs and reflects some of our national development priorities as already outlined in our national multiannual development plan and thus constitutes a

strategy for focused actions on sustainable human development, eradication of poverty and human rights. We expect that the necessary financial resources will be made available by our development partners to effectively implement this programme.

As we have just passed the midpoint towards achieving the MDGs by the target date of 2015, allow me to reiterate Suriname's commitment to realize sustainable development. We are ready to join the international community in complementing national efforts and creating strong global partnerships for accelerated actions to improve living conditions, well-being and opportunities for the many disadvantaged peoples throughout the globe.

Mr. Bart (Saint Kitts and Nevis): It is indeed an honour to address this body on this very important topic, and we must thank the President and the Secretary-General for the timely hosting of this debate.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has set its own country specific targets, which are directly related to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and we are fully committed to meeting them by the year 2015.

Poverty in Saint Kitts and Nevis is associated more with very low wages than with unemployment. On 30 July 2005, after a 350-year presence, the sugar industry was closed. That was due to unfavourable external developments, which led to its unprofitable performance. It left behind a country with high levels of debt and many displaced persons. Sugar was all they knew. In an effort to deal with the first of the MDGs, the Government partnered with the private sector and established retraining programmes and is now making land available for farming by small farmers. In terms of meeting that first MDG, we are on track, but much more has yet to be done.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has ensured that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. School meals are free at the primary level. Education is compulsory for all children up to the age of 16, and there is a literacy rate of approximately 98 per cent. To that extent, we have met the requirements of MDG 2. However, the Government has recognized that there is a need to do more. In this age of sophisticated technology and computers, literacy has to be redefined. We are currently discussing a green paper that describes educational development policies over the next 10 years.

With regard to the issue of gender equality, Saint Kitts and Nevis ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1985. Through our Department of Gender Affairs, we have sought to ensure that women and men enjoy equal access to services offered by the Federation. Women in Saint Kitts and Nevis enjoy equal access to education at all levels. We have experienced some progress in the professions, but meeting our targets in the area of political decision-making and in the boardrooms of companies remains a challenge. There is a need to address the economic, social and cultural barriers that stand in the way. In order to do that, we need help.

Infant mortality rates have fluctuated over the years, but in recent years we have seen some improvement. That is reflective of the ongoing expansion of the coverage and enhanced equality of the care given to prenatal and perinatal patients at the primary-health-care level.

The Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis has a comprehensive maternal health programme that caters for persons who gain access to care at hospitals and health centres. All babies are delivered at hospitals; there are no longer home deliveries. Maternal death in Saint Kitts and Nevis is rare, and in that regard we have met MDG 5.

HIV/AIDS remains a threat. We are conscious of the devastation that it can have on those who contribute most to our economy. We continue to fight the disease and the stigmatization of people living with it. In addition to the social benefits that we gain by fighting the stigma, we believe we can better monitor and have more accurate figures regarding the disease.

The Ministry of Health has prepared a national strategic plan for health and development, which outlines our country's plan for health. It goes hand in hand with the Millennium Development Goals. We believe in a holistic approach to the issue of health, and so MDGs 4, 5 and 6 are being addressed under the health plan, along with other diseases, so as to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with chronic non-communicable diseases. The plan addresses prevention, treatment for clients, support, advocacy, surveillance, epidemiology and research, and programme coordination and management with regard to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. The plan will be available to the public next week. We

expect to begin seeing success by 2012, resulting in a population that will have adequate access to quality health care at an affordable cost, improved quality of life and increased life expectancy.

Ensuring environmental sustainability, MDG 7, is a goal of the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis. Our very survival depends upon it. It is vital for keeping our tourism industry alive. Sugar cane has prevented disastrous erosion of the soil and has allowed the filtration of rainfall to the aquifers that supply approximately 90 per cent of our potable water to the population. Climate change is an ever-present danger, but, in the country-specific context of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the achievement of this MDG has more to do with what the developed countries are doing than with what we do. Therefore, the achievement of this MDG cannot be seen in the context of the nation; it must be a global Goal. While some things have been done, the evidence dictates that more has to be done.

It is known that there is much benefit to be gained from global partnership. In an attempt to improve our competitiveness in the global economy, we joined the Caribbean Single Market and Economy in 2006. It is hoped that, if we are allowed to operate on a level playing field, this important stage of regional integration will generate opportunities for economic growth. But our size will forever be a challenge in terms of economies of scale.

The MDGs are incorporated into the goals that my Government has set for its people. It is not an easy road, but we are taking it. We are continuing to invest in our people, in agriculture and in infrastructure, and we are partnering with the private sector. We are doing what has been asked of us, but we need the help of others. This is not a plea for charity or pity, but a request that those whose activities have caused damage to the developing world and who have set the terms of a world economic order in which we had no say recognize their moral obligation to provide adequate compensation to the developing world.

Mr. Kavanagh (Ireland): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) summarize the main development challenges facing the world. They present a set of clear and measurable targets to be achieved by 2015. When the MDGs were agreed, they spurred our efforts to tackle poverty and its consequences. Much has been achieved to date, but more needs to be done. We must use this opportunity, now in 2008, to address the challenges we face and to get back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015, before it is too late.

The MDGs inform all aspects of Ireland's development cooperation programme, Irish Aid, and provide the context in which it operates. That is true not least in relation to poverty reduction, which is the overarching objective of Irish Aid's activities. Furthermore, Irish Aid has mainstreamed gender equality, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability throughout its work, as well as addressing the corresponding MDGs through specific programmes.

Ireland has committed itself to spending 0.7 per cent of gross national product on official development assistance (ODA) by 2012, and we are on track to meet that target; last year, we reached 0.5 per cent on schedule. The United Nations remains at the core of our collective efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and Ireland therefore is strongly committed to continuing to support the United Nations system and to enhancing its capacity to continue to provide leadership in that regard. We will soon sign multiannual funding agreements with UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Negotiations with the World Health Organization are under way, and we plan to start negotiations on a multiannual funding agreement with the United Nations Development Programme later this year. That will give those organizations very sizeable predictability of funding.

While time will not permit a full description of all activities undertaken by Irish Aid to support efforts to achieve the MDGs, a number of particular initiatives are perhaps worthy of mention.

Ireland's commitment to combating hunger is not without historical context. The failure of the potato crop in Ireland in the 1840s led to a famine that left one and a half million people dead and forced one million to emigrate — a loss of some 25 per cent of my country's population within 24 months. Since then, Ireland's fortunes have changed, but hunger and food insecurity continue to hamper progress in reaching the MDGs in many developing countries. Ireland stands with them.

In 2007, we established a Hunger Task Force in Ireland with the aim of identifying the particular contribution that our country can make to international efforts to eliminate hunger and to tackle food

insecurity. The Task Force brings together leading figures from international organizations, the non-governmental sector, third-level institutions, Government and the private sector. The Task Force will report to Irish Aid later this year with analysis and recommendations on how Ireland can best address the issue of world hunger through specific policy formulation, programming engagement and targeted resource allocation.

We also share the heightened international concern at the possible effects of the soaring prices of primary commodities on the ability of a significant portion of the world's population to feed themselves. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General and his colleagues will give special attention to that issue at this April's session of the Chief Executives Board.

Health is one of the key sectors supported by Irish Aid. Ireland uses sector-wide approaches and channels its funding through Government-managed pooling arrangements. In that way, we seek to help strengthen health systems, providing the foundation needed to achieve the MDGs on child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS and malaria.

More specifically, Ireland works closely with UNICEF to reduce child mortality and, more generally, to improve the situation of the world's children. We will soon sign a multi-year funding agreement, committing to fixed increases in core funding for UNICEF for the remainder of the life of the Fund's Strategic Plan. Ireland is committed to spending at least €100 million per year combating HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases in developing countries, and we are doing so.

Of all the Millennium Development Goals, the least progress has been achieved on the Goal of reducing maternal mortality by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015. The number of women dying in childbirth continues to be startling: the risk of a woman dying from complications of pregnancy in her lifetime is as high as one in seven in some African and Asian countries. That statistic is unthinkable to those in many more fortunate countries. It is clear that extra effort is needed on the part of all countries to ensure the achievement of MDG 5. Ireland is proud to have contributed €2 million to the new UNFPA thematic trust fund for maternal health, "No Woman Should Die Giving Life". That fund will support 75 of the poorest countries with a view to delivering better services for women before, during and after childbirth.

Education has been central to Ireland's own economic and social development, so it is perhaps not surprising that we advocate sustained and planned investment in education in developing countries. We are pleased to see the progress that some countries — in particular our partners Tanzania and Uganda — have made towards achieving the Goal of universal primary education by 2015. We will continue to work towards the achievement of that Goal.

This year, Ireland's total ODA budget totalled €914 million, and we are proud that our official development spending is increasing steadily. However, funding alone is not enough; a true partnership is needed if we are to achieve the MDGs. We must all strive for greater aid effectiveness. Donors should align with national plans, as developing countries lead their own development. We should all seek to improve governance: globally, by increasing coherence among donors and other international development actors, and nationally, by working together to build capacity in developing countries. For if we fail to achieve the MDGs, it is the world's poorest who will continue to suffer. We should all be held accountable.

Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, our delegation associates itself with the important statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. However, we wish to make several comments.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela highlights the importance of the overall topic of this thematic debate, related to evaluating the achievements and challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We consider it a response to the clamour of the majority of the developing countries at the economic and social deterioration to which millions of citizens are being subjected because of the lack of access to the financial resources necessary for life. That was denounced by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, at the 2005 World Summit (see A/60/PV.6), when heads of State or Government, having gathered together to carry out such an evaluation, found themselves in a debate on United

Nations reform, which postponed a discussion that is urgent and imperative for our peoples.

For the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the topic of eradicating poverty and hunger is crucial. It has become the main pillar of action for our social development policy, because we understand that poverty is one of the most savage affronts to human beings, as it attacks their dignity and violates their human rights. Moreover, poverty cannot be eliminated through the capitalist production model, which, by its very nature and its dynamics, destroys and condemns human beings, producing misery and causing injustice and inequality.

We also welcome this debate not only because of the results that we can show the world as a result of some of the targets met within the framework of the Millennium Declaration goals, but also, and in particular, because of the social debt that we are paying back to our peoples.

To that end, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on the basis of the principles of equity, solidarity and social inclusion and with the objectives of eradicating poverty, achieving social justice, guaranteeing the universal and equal enjoyment of human rights and strengthening social and citizen participation, has been developing a series of social programmes known as social missions. These are socio-economic programmes on a massive scale, articulated within the new socialist development model currently being formulated within the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and aimed primarily at those who were victims of social exclusion. The results of those programmes in the fight against poverty are clear.

In 1998, the number of poor households and households in extreme poverty accounted for 43.9 and 17.1 per cent of all households, respectively. Nine years later, in the first six months of 2007, the percentage of the country's population living in extreme poverty was recorded at 9.7 per cent, illustrating that our country has been able to achieve the goal on extreme poverty established in the Millennium Declaration well ahead of schedule.

Our achievements with regard to education are equally well known. The enrolment rate for basic education, which stood at 82.8 per cent in 1998, has continued to increase consistently, reaching 91.9 per cent in 2006. That makes it possible for us to say that we expect to reach the goal of universal basic education before 2015.

In barely two years, through our Robinson Mission programme, we have succeeded in eradicating illiteracy in our country, earning us the praise of UNESCO. That, along with the establishment of the Bolivarian Schools project and the Ribas and Sucre Missions, has made it possible to implement policies with the sole objective of ensuring education and ending the former exclusionary nature of various subsystems of our educational system. As a result of that policy, 1,770,778 citizens have been guaranteed the right to education, giving them access to greater opportunities in society and to meet one of the basic conditions for improving their living standards. It will also allow us to achieve the goal on gender equality in education, given that we have now achieved parity at all educational levels.

With regard to health, in an effort to ensure access for millions of Venezuelan men and women, a series of policies have been implemented to provide primary health care and access to technology, equipment and hospitals in traditionally excluded regions. The Barrio Adentro Mission is the main vehicle through which that is being achieved. Thanks to that initiative, and in cooperation with the Government of Cuba, free specialist medical care has been provided to a significant percentage of the population through more than 8,500 primary health care centres that are available to almost 18 million people on a 24-hour basis.

With regard to well-equipped diagnostic centres, 1,235 such centres have been established throughout the country to provide the entire population with specialized services such as laboratory tests, X-rays, electrocardiograms, ultrasound tests, upper gastrointestinal endoscopies, ophthalmologic services, emergency diagnosis and intensive care services.

With regard to hospital infrastructure, I should like to point to the construction of the Dr. Gilberto Rodríguez Ochoa Latin American Paediatric Cardiology Hospital to care for children and adolescents with heart problems. The hospital contains 260 beds, 32 intensive care beds, four operating rooms, two haemodynamics units, 30 consultation rooms and an auditorium that can accommodate 130 people. The hospital provides care for patients from the Latin America and Caribbean region.

Another important point that I would like to underscore pertains to our health policy for the treatment of patients suffering from HIV/AIDS, which is based on the principles of universality, free services, equity, social integration, solidarity and non-discrimination. Through that policy, and thanks to an investment of BsF50 million — or about $25 million — medicines are distributed to all registered patients, thereby making it possible for us to fully comply with the goal in this regard.

At the international level, our country is attempting to build a fairer world based on solidarity by establishing mutually beneficial exchanges with our brothers of the South, so as to effectively achieve the Goals of the Millennium Declaration on the basis of solidarity. In that connection, as an oil producing and exporting country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been promoting energy integration in the context of South-South cooperation. I should therefore like to highlight the Petroamérica, Petrocaribe and Petrosur initiatives, which were designed as geopolitical facilitators aimed at establishing cooperation and integration mechanisms using the energy resources of the Caribbean, Central American and South American regions as a basis for improving the social and economic conditions of the peoples of the continent. In that regard, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is currently selling about 200,000 barrels of oil daily to Central America and the Caribbean. In addition to providing energy security in support of sustainable development for our sister peoples, this type of effort represents a total savings of some $1.6 billion annually for the countries involved.

We note that there have been references to climate change in this debate, and we are aware that its impact will prevent many countries from achieving the Goals by 2015, if the risk posed by climate change is not reduced and we do not adapt to or mitigate the effects of extreme natural events. Such events have produced catastrophic damage to infrastructure and have left hundreds of thousands of people homeless and without a way to earn a living. They have also threatened food security and increased the vulnerability of many countries of the South. We believe that this obliges the international community to consider the current indebtedness of countries and, in the light of the magnitude and frequency of such events, either partially or wholly cancel their debts. At the same time, the international community should consider a change in its role as international creditor.

We also join in the concerns of a growing number of experts, researchers and ecologists who question how the issue of energy is being addressed in the context of climate change, especially as regards the impact of deforestation, growing inequality and rising food prices, which could lead to an agricultural system based on the exploitation of labour and highly dependent upon large multinationals.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to support initiatives aimed at ensuring that all the citizens of the world — male and female alike — fully enjoy the economic, social and cultural rights to which they are entitled as human beings.

Mr. Tašovski (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): It is an honour to participate in this important thematic debate. I would like to express our thanks to the President of the General Assembly for convening this timely debate, especially now, when we are at the halfway point towards the target year set for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, the presence and the statements of the Secretary-General, the Prime Minister of Finland, the Foreign Minister of Mali and the panellists participating in the three panel discussions — on poverty and hunger, education and health, respectively — have shown the sense of urgency that both developing and developed countries attach to the achievement of the MDGs.

Since the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, in 2000, the MDGs have become the universally recognized development framework, and their implementation has become the number-one international development objective. Thus, 2008 is a crucial year for making progress in achieving the MDGs. But that will be possible only if we take focused and targeted actions in support of all eight Goals and if those actions are immediately increased and sustained until 2015, on the basis of a shared global strategy.

Attaining the MDGs by 2015 is a major priority for the General Assembly and the international community as a whole. Now, at the midpoint for attaining the Goals, we must take account of the progress made so far, discuss possible solutions to the

existing challenges and renew our commitments to meet the target date of 2015.

Are we on track to meet that target? We are facing both old and new trends: income growth, climate change, high food and energy prices, globalization and urbanization. All of that has strong implications for the poorer countries. Provided that growth in gross domestic product per capita remains 3.5 per cent per annum for developing countries, the number of people living in poverty around the world will fall to 721 million by 2015. But, as we are aware, poverty continues to rise in sub-Saharan Africa and in many least developed countries. On the other hand, in some countries in the developing world, such as China and India, there has been sustained growth. Rapid worldwide growth created 45 million new jobs in 2007, but that also widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, we face serious challenges in sustaining the strong pace of economic growth in the world economy seen over the past few years. While economic growth rates are high, the developing countries — especially the poorest — are vulnerable to a downturn in the global economy.

However, with regard to a number of MDGs and other topics addressed during this thematic debate, some progress can be noted in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, mounting a global response to climate change and integrating the principles of sustainable development into national policies. Therefore, we must redouble our efforts to implement the MDGs, since it is becoming increasingly obvious that renewed commitment is needed with regard to some regions, in particular Africa.

The Republic of Macedonia, which, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union (EU), has aligned itself with the statement made by the Minister for Growth of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union presidency, is fully committed to the achievement of the MDGs. We fully agree that every country bears the responsibility for its own development, which depends mainly on national policies and strategies. We also agree that global actions are necessary to support national efforts. We are aware that some regions need more shared responsibility than others in order to meet the projected targets. To that end, we endorse the call for renewed commitment to the implementation of the MDGs. We welcome the Secretary-General's high-level event, to take place on 25 September 2008, which is expected to yield additional results for the development financing challenge, as well as the forthcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha in November, as another opportunity to reach agreement on an effective approach aimed at more rapid achievement of all the MDGs.

Each country should assume ownership of and responsibility for its own development agenda and should integrate global MDG targets into its national targets and policies, resulting in programmes and budgetary allocations. In that respect, my Government has formulated its policies and strategies in the context of a comprehensive policy supporting the development agenda of the Republic of Macedonia. As a part of that policy, a national development plan for 2007-2009, outlining the country's strategy for pursuing and achieving the MDGs, has been finalized and adopted. The plan's strategic objective is to provide an overall framework for investments, co-financed from domestic and foreign public sources, that is consistent with the Republic of Macedonia's overall development objectives for that three-year period.

Specifically, the objectives of the national development plan are the following: to make a detailed assessment of the country's existing economic, social and environmental situation from the perspective of its development gaps vis-à-vis the EU and the disparities among its various geographical areas; to formulate strategic and operational objectives; to identify key development and investment priorities at the national level; and to design a consistent matrix whereby development and investment priorities would be met through the country's financial capabilities and in accordance with its macroeconomic and fiscal scenarios. My Government's programme for achieving the MDGs thus remains focused on four main targets: achieving decentralization and good governance through reforms in the area of self-governance, reducing poverty through economic development, supporting the health and education sectors and improving national capacities for sustainable development.

Let me conclude by expressing confidence that the fruitful discussions during this debate will have shown that, if we are to cope successfully with the challenges that lie ahead, partnerships must be built so that we can achieve our common goals. The Republic of Macedonia is ready to contribute to that end.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations A/62/PV.94

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

94th plenary meeting
Friday, 4 April 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015"

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mr. Talbot (Guyana): Your initiative, Mr. President, to convene a thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is most timely and welcome. Guyana is pleased to contribute to the deliberations on these important issues. In doing so, my delegation associates itself fully with the statements delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

The MDGs are an important dimension of the international development agenda. They represent a key focus of global efforts to build a better world in the twenty-first century, one where people everywhere live in dignity, free from want and fear and in an environment protected from the ravages of human activity. Our debate focuses on hunger and poverty, education and health: areas where the need for progress is especially urgent. Progress in those areas is of course integrally linked with achievements in respect of other Goals, notably those related to the empowerment of women, environmental sustainability and the strengthening of the global partnership.

The theme of our present debate aptly captures our shared recognition of the fact that progress towards the achievement of the MDGs on the whole is currently off track, despite the many instances of successful interventions reported by various countries and stakeholders in this very debate and the fact that the international community has the means to address the gaps that persist. As noted in the background information for this discussion, some 143 million children under the age of 5 in the developing world continue to suffer from inadequate nutrition. In a $65-trillion world economy, such a situation is nothing less than a call to resolute action. At the midpoint en route to 2015, our actions must be imbued with a new sense of urgency, and our partnerships with a renewed vitality, to ensure that the MDG agenda is put back on track.

Speaking from a national perspective, the Guyana MDG report for 2007, which summarizes my country's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, reveals that progress at the national level has been modest and uneven in recent years. Guyana has attained near universal primary education, but attention to some dimensions, such as improving the percentage of trained teachers and the student-teacher ratio, continues to be necessary. The retention of trained teachers, many of whom have been lost to developed countries and other regions, is also a major challenge.

Our country is on track to achieve targets in relation to the eradication of extreme hunger, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and ensuring environmental sustainability.

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However, intensified efforts are needed to make the attainment of targets in relation to the eradication of extreme poverty and combating HIV/AIDS more likely, as well as to consolidate the encouraging gains made recently towards eliminating the threat of malaria.

On the other hand, should current trends continue, achieving the targets set for reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating other major diseases may prove elusive.

Thankfully, South-South cooperation, including extensive medical assistance from the Republic of Cuba, has contributed in great measure to developing Guyana's capacity to address challenges in the health sector. We anticipate that an increase in the number of trained medical personnel, among other things, will make an appreciable difference in Guyana's indices in the health area over the medium to long term.

The attainment of the MDGs in Guyana remains firmly anchored in our country's poverty reduction strategy. The level of success in countering significant structural economic challenges and maintaining favourable national economic conditions overall will directly impact the prospects for attainment of the Goals by our country. At the centre of those endeavours is the need to improve agricultural production and productivity. Guyana's experience indicates that sustained economic growth remains a necessary, if not sufficient, condition to ensure progress towards the MDGs. Indeed, a number of further lessons can be drawn from the MDG experience that bear mention in our debate.

First, significant progress is possible with the scaling up of assistance and efforts. As a country participating in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, Guyana has benefited from significant multilateral and bilateral debt relief. The substantial decline in debt servicing has afforded us the opportunity to channel increasingly more of our resources towards poverty reduction. The higher level of investment in the social sectors has provided the basis for the more positive trends in achievement that we have begun to see recently. The programme on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, which is facilitated with assistance from the United States through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, provides a good example of the impact of scaled-up external assistance. Before the initiation of that programme in Guyana, in 2001, 35 per cent of children born to infected mothers were also born with the HIV/AIDS virus. By 2005, in areas where the programme was accessible, the percentage had dropped to an average of 5 per cent.

Secondly, the extent of progress is currently circumscribed mainly by the lack of resources, and by issues of sustainability where previous assistance had been received. There have been notable shortfalls in donor pledges and disbursement of financial resources to implement our poverty reduction strategy. For instance, from 2003 to 2006, Guyana received just one fifth of the amount pledged — and needed — for support to achieve the MDGs. Important resource gaps have been identified. The additional resources that are required are beyond the capacity of Guyana's current macroeconomic programme. The gap between resource commitments and disbursements therefore needs to be closed as a matter of urgency.

A third lesson is that a holistic approach remains the best guarantee for the successful achievement of the MDGs, given the interrelated nature of the challenges to be addressed. One of the more formidable of Guyana's challenges in meeting the MDGs is the problem of reducing the incidence of communicable diseases. It was widely accepted that our country had overcome the challenge posed by tuberculosis many years ago. However, with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the incidence of tuberculosis has resurfaced, to the extent that it is now recognized as a foremost public health challenge. In this instance, treating tuberculosis effectively is intricately linked to effectively addressing the challenge posed by HIV/AIDS, which of course is also closely linked with progress in other socio-economic areas.

Going forward, Guyana's critical challenges include addressing impediments to economic growth, including the maintenance of debt sustainability, strengthening agricultural production and productivity, addressing capacity-building needs and obstacles to resource absorption, optimizing the resource envelope, coping with rapidly rising prices for basic food items and energy, improving monitoring and evaluation methods, addressing competing priorities such as those occasioned by climate change, dealing with crime and security and exogenous shocks, mainstreaming gender issues and developing a national strategy for achieving the MDGs in Guyana.

The challenge from climate change is particularly real for a country like ours, which on the coasts is below sea level and subject to extensive flooding and which suffered a loss of nearly 60 per cent of its gross domestic product as a result of the last major inundation, in 2005. Care has to be taken to ensure that meeting the real challenge posed by climate change does not exacerbate the competition for resources to be devoted to the MDG challenge.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to underscore the fact that many gaps persist in the global effort to ensure the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. One is the relatively limited attention accorded to agriculture and food security. As the World Bank has noted, about 70 per cent of the MDG target group live in rural areas, particularly in Asia and Africa. For most of the rural poor, including in countries such as my own, agriculture is a crucial component in the successful attainment of the MDGs. Increased global investment in agriculture and food security is therefore essential to the success of the MDG agenda.

Mr. Yohannes (Ethiopia): First of all, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for organizing this thematic debate around the theme "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015". The debate is timely, as we are at the midpoint in the process of implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and must take stock of what has been accomplished so far and determine what tasks remain to be accomplished in order to achieve the Goals before the target date.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the African Group.

As indicated by various United Nations reports and previous General Assembly debates on the MDGs, the progress achieved so far has not been very encouraging, although varying degrees of progress has been made by countries. The mixed outcome of the efforts made, however, should not be viewed as lagging behind, but as an impetus for a further redoubling of our efforts and commitments to achieve the Goals.

The challenges associated with the implementation of the MDGs are obvious and have been discussed at various times and on various occasions in the past. But now that we are halfway through the MDG implementation process, it is high time that we identify the key challenges and take concrete actions to address them effectively and in a timely fashion. It has been repeatedly stressed that, unless we secure an adequate global partnership, efforts by developing countries alone will not yield the results that we all wish to see — at least not before the deadline.

Mr. Soborun (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is obvious that our development partners have failed to deliver on their promises to implement the Monterrey Consensus, the Millennium Declaration and other internationally agreed commitments. That lack of partnership, coupled with the increasingly volatile and difficult global economic situation, has compounded the challenges already being faced by developing countries, has negated whatever limited progress they may have achieved thus far in the process and has increased the magnitude of the difficulties.

My delegation fully shares the view that scaling up investment in agriculture, infrastructure and social sectors should be accorded paramount importance. In order to accelerate industrial development and increase overall economic growth, it is essential to develop the agricultural sector, which is crucial in ensuring the provision of inputs for industry and achieving food security. The emphasis placed on agriculture by our development partners and by the international financial institutions, however, has been inadequate, rendering weak and ineffective that sector's significant contributions to the efforts of developing nations to combat hunger and poverty. Likewise, the lack of a sufficient and constant supply of resources in the social sectors, such as health — since the majority of the people in developing countries suffer from preventable and curable diseases — and education, an area whose contribution to capacity-building is critical, is one of the major obstacles to achieving the MDGs.

Ethiopia, with its agrarian economy, has duly recognized the key role of the agricultural sector in the economy and its quick, positive impact, right from the beginning, on the growth of the other economic and social sectors. The agricultural sector provides critical resources in terms of the human power and the natural resources needed to achieve fast development, and it is the major source of foreign exchange.

That is why the Government of Ethiopia has prepared an agricultural development-led

industrialization strategy with the objective of according primacy to the agricultural sector as the driving force behind overall development. Under the strategy, thousands of development agents have been trained through agricultural technical and vocational education and training institutions, and more than 5,000 farmer training centres have been established to support farmers in increasing agricultural production enough to meet local needs and to make the country competitive in world markets, with comparative advantages. An improved package of extension services has been made available in accordance with existing environmental and market conditions; these are designed to address problems related to production and productivity.

For those and other reasons, the sector has so far been registering steady growth in terms of production and, together with strong export performance, has contributed to the achievement of tangible results in speeding up economic growth in recent years. During the current budget year alone, we have so far achieved 10.8 per cent economic growth, and we have also registered average economic growth of 10 per cent for five years in a row. That significant economic performance also happens to be above the average rate of economic growth for countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethiopia, in addition to being among the first countries to prepare and implement its Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, has made positive progress in implementing the MDGs. In fact, during the preparation of the now-completed Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme at the dawn of the new Ethiopian millennium, the Government seized the opportunity to incorporate the MDGs into our national development plan. In our efforts, we have achieved encouraging results that should make us optimistic that we will meet the targets of some of the Goals.

With regard to primary education coverage, the number of children in primary schools increased from 8.1 million in 2002 to 12.6 million in 2006. That brought the gross enrolment rate from 61.6 per cent in 2002 to 91.3 per cent in 2006. The enrolment ratio for females also increased, from 52.2 per cent in 2002 to 83.9 per cent in 2006.

The Government of Ethiopia also recognizes that the poor health status of its citizens is a serious constraint on economic productivity and impedes efforts to reduce poverty and combat hunger. Common poverty-related diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis, childhood illnesses and HIV/AIDS, continue to cut short the lives of Ethiopians. The Government, fully supporting the emphasis on health in the MDGs, has developed and has begun to implement a 20-year health sector development programme. Early results of its implementation indicate that access to health services has risen from 52 to 72 per cent and that the under-five and infant mortality rates have both declined, from 167 to 123 per 1,000 people and from 97 to 77 per 1,000, respectively, all in five years.

The Government, in its determination to build on what has been achieved over the years, has designed a comprehensive five-year development plan, called the Plan to Accelerate Sustainable Development to End Poverty. The plan is now being implemented, with the aim of carrying forward important strategic objectives being pursued under the completed Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme. Not only will the agricultural and social sectors continue to receive the highest priority and attention in our development, but other important sectors such as energy and infrastructure development will also be accorded the emphasis that they need and deserve. The measures taken to develop the energy sector, by building the capacity of our national power-generation schemes for rural electrification and electricity exporting programmes, have been very encouraging so far.

The Government's efforts to expand the country's national road network outward from the capital in all four directions and to develop communication infrastructures have also started to have a positive impact on the growth of the economy. Both sectors will undoubtedly continue to enjoy the Government's full support, as they are crucial in achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals. Although developing countries are doing their best to make sure that they do not remain behind, they need to secure an adequate and predictable supply of resources from our development partners.

My delegation therefore calls for an increase in pro-poor investment in order to enable developing countries, especially those in Africa, to achieve the MDGs by the target date. The full and timely realization of the international community's

commitment to meet the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross national income as official development assistance is highly imperative.

We also call upon the international community to level the playing field for African countries so they can fairly compete in international markets and to take additional measures for the effective implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Everything but Arms initiative.

By delivering on all promises in terms of support in financing and by our partners taking the urgent, necessary steps with regard to the implementation of major development initiatives, we believe that the targets of the MDGs will be achievable, despite the multifaceted challenges we are facing now.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in French*): At the outset and on behalf of my delegation, I would like to congratulate the President of The General Assembly on having convened this high-level debate on the theme "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015". Since assuming the presidency of the General Assembly, Mr. Kerim has taken many initiatives within your mandate, particularly with regard to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I would like also to congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his tireless efforts towards the same end and for having fully involved all relevant bodies of the United Nations system in order to achieve the MDGs.

Mauritania aligns itself with the statement made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bangladesh on behalf, respectively, of the Group of 77 and China, the Group of African States and the least developed countries.

This high-level debate is an important milestone in assessing the progress made so far towards achieving the MDGs, as well as the difficulties that have been encountered in this endeavour. At the half-way point, we must admit that the hoped-for results on the MDGs are far from being achieved. Even if some countries have made progress, for many, particularly in Africa, much remains to be done in terms of combating poverty and hunger and improving education and health, not to mention all the other areas. It is urgent that the international community genuinely mobilize itself towards the achievement of the MDGs by providing the resources and means necessary to reach that objective.

Following free and fair elections in 2007, Mauritania is currently a democratic country with institutions based on the people's will and where the rule of law exists and democratic freedoms are respected. The Government has formulated a three-year development programme. In order to finance this programme, the assistance of development partners was requested at a round table held in Paris in 2007. At that event, approximately $1.9 billion was pledged. The Mauritanian authorities are working with donors, to monitor the status of the use of the pledged funds while taking the necessary steps to guarantee swift implementation and ensuring that all sectors work together towards carrying out projects to which the international community has committed itself. With the mobilization of the resources agreed at the Paris round table, Mauritania will be able to make good progress towards achieving the MDGs, beginning with strengthening its poverty alleviation programme.

With regard to health, my Government's efforts have focused on improving the quantity and quality of the services offered to the population. In this framework, we will be taking major steps, inter alia, to build and extend the health infrastructure network, improve the supply and distribution of medicine and prevent the most widespread illnesses.

The midterm plan for our Health and Nutrition Support Programme is being reviewed. The Programme was launched three years ago and aimed at improving the effectiveness of the health sector in Mauritania, in particular with respect to promoting quality care and to changing the mindset of mothers regarding the nutrition of young children. This programme is helping to improve people's health and nutrition by improving the living standards of pregnant women and nursing mothers and children under 2 years of age, by helping to spread the consumption of iodized salt and by building the capacity of health care institutions.

With regard to HIV/AIDS, a national awareness campaign is under way to draw attention to the dangers of this disease and to explain how it is transmitted and how to protect oneself. In this framework, 70 non-governmental organizations and 52 women's cooperatives have received funding.

The National Institute of Medical Specialists is providing on-the-job training in surgery and

paediatrics; there has been improvement in the staffing of regional hospitals. The Institute has also organized visits by surgeons to the interior of the country to bring health care to the people. Despite our efforts, the ratios for both generalists and specialists continue to be below those recommended by the World Health Organization.

In the area of education, a status report is being prepared to introduce major reforms to enable that sector to meet human resource requirements, based on appropriate training and taking account of the realities of the contemporary world and the demands of globalization.

Concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women, Mauritania has taken important steps by making men and women equal under the law. The country's development strategy, which aims to reduce the percentage of Mauritanians living under the poverty line to 17 per cent, puts Mauritanian women at the core of its anti-poverty strategy. To this end, special priority has been given to women in terms of building their capacity to participate in economic life by emphasizing the improvement of women's access to the market through better access to bank loans, microcredit and savings; access to secure property rights; and increased participation by women, particularly women heads of household, in wealth-generating activities.

In terms of employment of women in the public sector, major progress has been made since Mr. Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdellahi assumed the presidency of the Republic in April 2007. For the first time in Mauritania's history, women have been appointed by the President to senior posts, as ambassadors, regional governors, prefects and other senior positions which were previously reserved to men.

Furthermore, by law there is a 20 per cent quota for women in the two chambers of the parliament and in municipal councils. Mauritanian women are gaining all their rights and achieving full equality with men under laws guaranteeing the development and empowerment of a group that represents more than 50 per cent of the population.

The efforts being made by Mauritania cannot, on their own, ensure that we achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015; the solidarity and support of the international community are also needed. The urgent mobilization of the funds pledged at the Paris round table will be an important step in that direction.

The Acting President: I call now on the observer of the Observer State of The Holy See.

Monsignor Auza (Holy See): In the year 2000, in this very Hall, heads of State or Government agreed on an ambitious, yet needed, set of global development goals to be achieved by 2015. At the halfway point, while much has been done towards achieving the goals, abject poverty, hunger, illiteracy and lack of even the most basic health care are still rampant, indeed worsening, in some regions. Tackling these challenges, which continue to afflict hundreds of millions of people, remains therefore at the very centre of our concerns.

Authoritative studies tell us that, in spite of the remarkable economic growth in many developing countries, the overall goal of reducing hunger and poverty has remained elusive. My delegation believes that greater international solidarity is necessary if we are to succeed in narrowing the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor countries and between individuals within countries.

While international aid is important, a fairer international trade environment, including addressing market-distorting practices, which disadvantage weaker economies, is even more decisive. In this regard, the importance of the upcoming Doha review conference cannot be stressed enough. The combined efforts to meet the 0.7 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) and to review trade and financing mechanisms, on the one hand, and to end bad governance and internecine conflicts in recipient States, on the other, will go a long way in lifting millions of people out of extreme poverty and hunger.

My delegation wishes to assure the Assembly that the Holy See remains actively engaged in alleviating poverty and hunger, which are an offence against human dignity. It will not cease to highlight these basic needs, so that they remain at the centre of international attention and are addressed as a matter of social justice.

The Holy See is very pleased with the good progress made towards achieving universal access to primary education, with some of the poorest regions seeing a dramatic increase in enrolment. However, without redoubled efforts, 58 countries may not

achieve the goal of universal primary schooling by 2015.

Education underpins all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is the most effective tool to empower men and women to achieve greater social, economic and political freedom. Governments and civil society, public and private sectors and parents and teachers must invest in the education of future generations to prepare them to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized society. In particular, utmost efforts must be made to give equal educational opportunities to boys and girls, and to ensure that no child is left behind for purely economic and social reasons. Precisely with this end in view, thousands of educational institutions of the Catholic Church are located in degraded inner cities and in far-flung villages, in the peripheries of huge cities and in places where children are constrained to work in order to survive.

The health-related MDGs also require our collective action. While progress has been made in reducing child mortality, there has been slower progress in addressing maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The overriding cause of the slow progress has been the lack of resources at the most basic levels of health care and the continued lack of access to even those levels. It has long been demonstrated that investing in primary health care, rather than in selective, culturally divisive and ideologically driven forms of health services, which camouflage the destruction of life among medical and social services, is one of the most cost-effective and successful ways to improve the overall quality of life and the stability of families and communities.

Moreover, the lack of progress on the health-related goals demonstrates the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of the MDGs. The significant correlation between poverty and the persistent high levels of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and maternal mortality is evident. My delegation wishes to assure members that the Holy See, through its institutions, will continue to provide basic health care, with a preferential option for the most underserved and marginalized sectors of society.

This thematic debate, at the halfway point between the Millennium Declaration and 2015, comes at this rather poignant time of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the heart of both the Declaration and the MDGs is the goal of a better future for all. More than talks and summits, the achievement of this goal requires commitment and concrete action. Our common fight against extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and illness is not merely an act of generosity and altruism — it is a condition sine qua non for a better future and a better world fit for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to the President for organizing this important debate.

Palestine aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Palestinian people face serious challenges in their attempts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While progress has been made, the Palestinian people have been unable to create an enabling domestic environment for realizing their MDGs: namely an environment free from the oppression and punitive, destructive restrictions and measures of military occupation — an environment in which the ability to progress is not contingent on the occupier's permission, but rather on the actual work and energy exerted by a people to achieve these goals. The ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, constitutes the main and most formidable obstacle to the Palestinian people's achievement of any form of sustainable development and the MDGs as a whole.

Particularly over the past eight years, the illegal policies undertaken by Israel, the occupying Power, have actually plunged Palestine into a development process, in reverse, undoing all previous progress towards the MDGs. According to the World Bank, the Palestinian economy registered steady growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) of 8 per cent each year until 1999. The World Bank notes that since 2000, however, due to the harsh effects of the Israeli-imposed closures and movement restrictions, Palestinian real GDP has shrunk by 40 per cent.

The socio-economic consequences of such a regression of the economy are vast. This dire situation has negatively impacted the goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger among the Palestinian people. Poverty has risen to unprecedented levels due to rising unemployment, and food insecurity has

become a major concern. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) now warns that almost half of the population does not have enough food to meet its needs.

This humanitarian crisis is a man-made disaster caused by occupation policies, especially the collective punishment which Israel continues to inflict on the Palestinian civilian population via, inter alia, closures and restrictions on movement, home demolitions and illegal confiscation of Palestinian land. In this regard, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cites Israel's matrix of movement restrictions as "a primary cause of poverty, and the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza Strip" (*A/61/500, para. 37*). Such illegal measures are being taken to extremes by the occupying Power, which continues to impose a suffocating siege on the Gaza Strip. It also continues to illegally construct and expand settlements and the wall in the West Bank, turning Palestinian communities into isolated bantustans, further dissected by more than 580 checkpoints and roadblocks, and making movement and internal trade between Palestinian cities and towns nearly impossible.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is most dire as living conditions continue to plummet. On 9 August 2007, Filippo Grandi, Deputy Commissioner-General of UNRWA, declared:

> "Gaza risks becoming a virtually 100 per cent aid-dependent, closed-down and isolated community within a matter of months, or even weeks, if the present regime of closures continues".

Since then, Israel's siege has caused even further devastation as hundreds of industries and factories have been destroyed or shut down and thousands of employment-generating opportunities have been halted or lost, forcing the entire population to survive only on the minimal humanitarian assistance that the occupying Power permits to enter the area.

The negative effects of the occupation on the living conditions and development of the Palestinian people are not limited to the economy. The goal of universal primary education has also been gravely impacted. A recent school survey released by UNRWA in the Gaza Strip reveals a nearly 80 per cent failure rate among grades four to nine, with the highest rate among grade-four pupils, 90 per cent of whom failed math. Tragically, that is what results when children, who must cope with the psychological and physical traumas of constant exposure to conflict and violence and who have been forced into extreme poverty, go to school hungry and unable to focus and learn. Dropout rates for boys and girls are also increasing, and deepening poverty has led to increased levels of child labour. Moreover, despite earlier successes, attendance at girls' schools in the upper levels is decreasing, obstructing efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Palestinian people also continue to struggle to reduce child and maternal mortality rates, which have been affected by problems of access to health care and food supply. Israeli checkpoints, curfews and the wall obstruct access to health care and delivery facilities, affecting reproductive health care, both pre- and post-natal. Moreover, rising poverty and hunger have led to a marked increase in anaemia and malnutrition among Palestinian women and their children.

In addition to the impact on the economic, social and health situation, the Israeli occupation has also seriously harmed environmental sustainability. Environmental degradation due to scarcity of water, rapid population growth and Israeli land confiscation and exploitation of natural resources has reduced Palestinian green lands, forests and biodiversity from 4.3 per cent in 1998 to below 1.5 per cent by 2004. That dramatic loss of green lands is also due in part to Israel's systematic use of Palestinian land as a dumping ground for untreated chemical and sewage waste, as well as the construction of illegal settlements and the wall, the uprooting of trees and the obstruction of environmental projects, such as sewage and sanitation projects, especially in the Gaza Strip.

Special attention should be given by the international community to those unique circumstances and challenges confronting the Palestinian people. Here, we recall that, in the Millennium Declaration, world leaders affirmed the collective responsibility

> "to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level... [as] a duty... to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs" (*resolution 55/2, para. 2*).

Development cannot coexist with oppression and hegemony, whose worst manifestation is foreign

occupation. We must uphold our commitment to spare no effort to ensure that all civilian populations suffering disproportionately the consequences of armed conflicts and humanitarian crises are given the necessary assistance and protection so that they can be empowered to work towards a better future for themselves and their nations.

Palestine should not be the exception. The Palestinian people have clearly asserted their desire for peace and a life of freedom, dignity and prosperity for their children. Those goals also undoubtedly encompass the achievement of the MDGs, which would help to lift the Palestinian people out of the misery that the occupation has imposed on them. We thus reiterate our call for the international community's full and firm support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, which the world has come to realize and agree is a prerequisite not only for peace, but also for development, and without which achievement the MDGs will, regrettably, remain out of reach.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/32 of 19 November 2002, I now call on the observer of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Ms. Filip (Inter-Parliamentary Union): Allow me to begin by welcoming President Kerim's initiative of convening this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is my pleasure today to address the General Assembly on behalf of the member parliaments of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Over the years, through a number of resolutions and debates, the IPU has sought to disseminate the MDGs among parliamentarians as a way of stimulating a groundswell of activity at the legislative level. The parliamentary community, after all, has a role and responsibility in that process, not only because of its legislative function, but also — in a very practical sense — in terms of ensuring necessary budgetary allocations to support a large array of pro-poor economic and social policies.

An important illustration of our work on the MDGs will come in less than two weeks time on the occasion of the 118th IPU Assembly that will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, the overall theme of which will be pushing back the frontiers of poverty. That debate, like those that preceded it, will seek to build a better understanding among legislators of the concrete actions required to at least halve poverty by 2015, as set out in Goal 1, and will help to identify some of the best practices that members of parliament should support in their concurrent roles as legislators, community leaders and opinion-makers. Indeed, over the past few days, we have had the opportunity to hear from member States about the establishment of select parliamentary committees and sub-committees and about the passing of relevant MDG-related legislation in several countries.

Turning now to the question before us today — that of the challenges in helping countries achieve the MDGs in the remaining years — I wish to highlight three key critical areas from our perspective.

The first obvious challenge is to support more capacity-building for more informed and effective policy-making. Part of that is enabling members of parliament to better grasp competing policy options available to them, as well as building the capacities of parliament as an institution with distinct and far-reaching responsibilities. While things have certainly improved in that domain, we are convinced that much more remains to be done. The full potential of parliaments, especially but not exclusively in developing countries, to exercise their functions in a way that maximizes available resources and improves decision-making processes for development remains largely untapped. We are hence investing a lot in lending support to parliaments in the exercise of their functions.

One of our most recent initiatives in that respect consists of a new programme that IPU is setting up with the Office of the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries to help parliaments in those countries better integrate the Brussels Programme of Action into their own agenda of work.

Another initiative that may be worth mentioning here is being conducted with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and is aimed at strengthening the information and communication technology capacities of parliaments so that they can improve their working methods and become more open vis-à-vis the people whom they are elected to represent.

A second critical obstacle standing in the way of the MDGs, which we are keen to help remove, is that of funding. There is, as we know, a huge shortfall between current allocations to official development assistance (ODA) and the estimated cost of achieving the MDGs. ODA is a key source of development financing for precisely those countries that are now most off track; it is not increasing at sufficient speed, and its overall effectiveness continues to leave much to be desired. That is why the IPU will scale up its efforts in this domain, including by supporting the new Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) of the Economic and Social Council, where we work to provide a strong parliamentary input, including through the DCF Stakeholder Forum. Over the long term, we will also seek to help parliamentarians master the intricacies of the ODA machineries in both donor and recipient countries, with the aim of ensuring that every aid dollar spent achieves the best possible outcome.

A third key issue that, in our view, remains to be resolved if we want to recover some of the lost ground on the road to achieving the MDGs has to do with the formulation of more incisive, coherent and inclusive national development plans. Although some countries have managed to vastly improve their development planning, there is still a long way to go in order to ensure that national development plans are internally sound and consistent with actual priorities on the ground.

We believe that two key areas that have tended to be neglected — at least in relative terms — within national development plans are employment creation and gender equality. We are more than ever convinced that the decent-work agenda needs to be put squarely at the centre of national development plans if we are to make a serious leap forward in virtually all of the MDGs. To that effect, we will seek to work with the International Labour Organization to make sure parliaments understand that agenda and actively stand behind it.

Last but not least, policies targeting the specific needs of women, as key economic and political agents, must also receive more attention in national development plans. The IPU will continue to support this in many ways, including by helping more women participate in politics, where they remain severely underrepresented, and by helping parliaments integrate a gender perspective into the budgetary process.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Schulz (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) agrees with the President of the General Assembly that priority should be placed on poverty, education and health as the most challenging goals for our purposes today.

At the thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held last November, all the Governments in the world endorsed the outcome declaration, entitled "Together for humanity", in the strong belief that none of the major humanitarian challenges facing the world can be resolved by any organization or Government acting alone. We have spoken many times about Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 8 and the need for effective and constructive partnerships between Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. All too often, that objective remains far from being attained in practical terms; yet it is an absolutely essential prerequisite for achieving the MDGs.

We will continue our efforts to involve National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in national planning to deal with the risks and vulnerability that are produced by poverty, lack of education and rampant disease. We will also continue to focus on communities and implementation needs in policy and programming discussions, not least because statistics and data on progress, as often presented, too frequently mask the reality of despair. The tendency to discuss a nation's poverty or other indicators in terms of averages does not enable us to gain a real understanding of national, communal or individual realities.

Besides partnerships, our concern extends to two other issues. First, we are concerned by the fact that the non-achievement of the MDGs per se implies a continued impact on human risks as they define humanitarian vulnerability. We are ever more concerned that continuing population growth, environmental degradation, conflict, economic and financial crisis, slowed economic growth and agflation will expose every human being to a growing potential for risk, which in turn will further negatively affect every individual's vulnerability status. As if that were

not enough, climate change and its humanitarian consequences is an issue of a scale that will multiply risks and increase vulnerability to the extent that it will change every community's way of life and every individual's identity.

Secondly, we believe that there must be no gaps in funding action to achieve each MDG. It is only common sense that, while there might be other factors that hamper achievement of the MDGs, no progress in implementation can be made if there is inadequate funding. In that context, it should go without saying that funding for adaptation measures in response to climate change must be largely, if not fully, subject to additionality.

We are ready to share our experience and expertise. In implementing our Global Agenda, we have the clear intention of delivering results that assist in the achievement of the MDGs. To show what we do in a measurable way, I will offer just one example. In 2006, the IFRC published a booklet describing its activities in support of the achievement of the MDGs. The booklet is available on the Internet and remains a valid source of information, demonstrating measurable action and providing illustrative examples of measures taken by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to advance common goals. In addition, a baseline survey conducted by the IFRC to assess our ability to reach the most vulnerable showed that our programmes reached an estimated 158.5 million people in 2005.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, and mindful of the time limits that the presidency has set for interventions, we ask the following. All of us must be reiterative, accountable and transparent in demonstrating our resolve to achieve the MDGs. Governments must commit themselves to the building of meaningful partnerships. Implementation of the MDGs and adaptation to climate change must progress in a complementary and synergistic manner. Agreed funding levels must be reached sooner rather than later, given the additionality aspect of climate change adaptation funding. Otherwise, and unless individuals in communities become involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of MDG-related programmes, achieving the MDGs by 2015 will remain a noble dream, failing to become a human reality.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Shafer (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): I would like to express my sincere thanks, on behalf of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Malta, for this opportunity to speak on the crucial topic of recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and maintaining a steady course to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

First, my highest congratulations go to the President of the General Assembly on his wise guidance in organizing this important thematic debate and choosing the MDGs as an area of focus for the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. It is only with leadership of his calibre that the United Nations, our most indispensable international institution, can come back from the current crisis in resources and personnel to emerge even more effective and respected worldwide. From the onset, the Order has pledged to continue expanding our cooperation with the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance and sustainable development, and we reiterate that pledge today.

The Order of Malta considers the Millennium Development Goals to be an example of the teachings of the two most recent Popes on the preferential option for the poor. Combating poverty, along with diseases and suffering, which are other MDG targets, has been at the heart of the Order's activities for more than 900 years. Since its founding in the eleventh century, the Order of Malta has historically directed its efforts towards the poor, the sick and the homeless, regardless of race, religion or nationality. The Order's 12,500 members, 80,000 permanent volunteers and professional medical staff and 13,000 doctors, nurses and stretcher-bearers make up an exceptional network permanently present in 120 countries, providing hospitals, hospices and medical services. Those activities are carried out with great expertise, often by the Order's worldwide relief service, Malteser International.

With respect to MDG 1, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the Order is saddened by the unfortunate fact that the absolute number of poor is rising in sub-Saharan Africa and is projected to be around 360 million by 2015, despite an overall per capita gross domestic product growth in developing

countries worldwide. That is the greatest challenge to the realization of our Goal on poverty.

Background papers for this meeting highlight the improvement of slums as a unique grassroots opportunity for reaching the MDGs. Towards that goal, the Order has considerably expanded its activities in those most disadvantaged areas. For example, in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, the Order finances numerous health centres and operates far-reaching programmes for the treatment of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

The fight against hunger is an even more challenging part of the MDGs. Inflated food prices, unfair trade regulations and climate change are among the obstacles. The Order of Malta demonstrates its substantial commitment to eliminating hunger in the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There, we oversee nutrition centres for undernourished and malnourished children. At the same time, we distribute seeds and small livestock to their parents and teach them about planting and nutrition. The Order is grateful to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Food Programme for partially funding those initiatives and working as partners towards meeting the goals on hunger, with a focus on sustainability. Successful progress towards MDG 1 is key to more rapid progress towards all eight Goals.

The Order of Malta works towards the Goal on education by increasing the availability of education in developing countries, particularly for girls. For example, the Order has established kindergartens in Sao Paulo and Brasilia, Brazil, while giving job training and employment to unmarried mothers. We have a medical centre in Milot, Haiti, which educates 600 children in addition to meeting the medical needs of women and children. The Order administers schools in western Afghanistan for 20,000 children, 40 per cent of whom are girls.

The MDGs regarding health are of particular importance to the Order. The Order has been working towards the MDGs in health in Cambodia after its 30-year civil war. We have carried out a comprehensive community-based mother-child health project there. Infant health, maternal health and HIV/AIDS converge in the issue of mother-to-child transmission of the virus. In Mexico, the Order of Malta's programmes bring infected women into prenatal care and, because of that, all have given birth to healthy, disease-free children. There, as in the many countries with Order of Malta programmes, we align ourselves with efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals. On five continents, the Order operates clinics and hospitals for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis — all diseases that disproportionately affect the poorest people. MDGs 4, 5 and 6 on health are interconnected. Failure on any one is likely to slow progress on another.

The President returned to the Chair.

We are grateful to speak on such an important theme, and we are honoured to be partners with Member States and the dedicated professionals of the United Nations on our common goals. We are convinced more than ever of the importance of the MDGs, which cover the spectrum of human rights and social justice issues that are at the core of the Order's raison d'être. With the continued leadership and support of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, those goals become more real every day. We are emboldened by the commitment and admirable leadership of the General Assembly. It is now up to us in the international community to complete the realization of the Goals by 2015.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/83 of 9 December 2003, I now call on the observer for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Mr. Tommasoli (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance): In 2000, the Millennium Summit and the consensus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) created for the first time the conditions for concerted long-term action to bring about a lasting impact on the lives of the poorest. The eight MDGs are interdependent and interact with other areas for action laid down in the Millennium Declaration. Peace and security, equal and guaranteed rights of all citizens to political participation, and equal access to resources, infrastructure and public services are key factors for the achievement of the MDGs.

There are many examples of the linkages between the achievement of some MDGs, broad political dynamics and democratic processes. On MDG 1, data show that poverty reduction has been accompanied by rising inequality. The United Nations *Millennium Development Goals Report 2007* states that "the

benefits of economic growth in the developing world have been unequally shared, both within and among countries".

MDG 3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women includes a specific indicator on the number of women elected to national parliaments. That indicator shows that women gained ground politically, though men still wield control, and that women are also underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies.

The links between the MDGs and the political environment can be made even more explicit. The choice of Mongolia to adopt a national MDG 9 on promoting human rights, fostering democratic governance and fighting corruption shows that democratic institutions and practices, in addition to contributing an enabling environment for the achievement of the MDGs, can constitute an objective tailored to addressing country-specific needs.

The rich discussion of the past few days has highlighted the importance of two principles: ownership of the strategies aimed at the achievement of the MDGs, and mutual accountability within the global partnership envisioned by the MDGs, which emphasizes the responsibilities of the international community in honouring its commitments, including in terms of the volume and predictability of official development assistance.

I wish to underscore two additional elements emerging in many countries and regions that play a role in the achievement of the MDGs.

The first is the very concept of ownership, as related to the importance of the strengthening and consolidation of democratic institutions. While the responsibility of defining and implementing national strategies remains with Governments, the concept of ownership has gradually widened so as to encompass other actors, such as civil society organizations and legislatures, that constitute an arena for dialogue on national priorities and exercise indispensable oversight of the implementation of national strategies. That implies that exclusive emphasis on the executive branch may undermine the functions of other actors in political systems, parliaments and political parties above all.

The second element is represented by the interlinkages between the promotion of broad-based, equitable growth on the one hand and democratic practices on the other. In fact, the time horizon utilized for the definition of the MDGs — 15 years — presupposes the creation of long-term visions of national development that can be effectively pursued only if they are shared beyond the lifespan of an executive so that they can be supported over time, even in the event of a change in Government. Experience shows that countries that have succeeded over time have invested in the development of such long-term visions, in the building of capacities for the effective functioning of democratic institutions and in the creation and consolidation of mechanisms to translate long-term visions into reality.

This is particularly challenging in highly polarized political environments, not least in post-conflict situations, since the space for dialogue is reduced and the scope for the definition of nationally owned, broad-based visions for development is limited. And yet, as many speakers have recalled in this debate, there is a need for long-term engagement and support by the international community in such contexts.

In the 2006-2011 International IDEA Strategy, the links between democracy and development are a prominent cross-cutting dimension. In June, IDEA will organize a round table on democracy and development in Delhi, back to back with the 2008 meeting of the IDEA Council, comprising our 25 member States. The Delhi round table will be an opportunity to address the links between democracy and development, including from the angle of the MDG agenda.

Let me conclude by stressing International IDEA's support for the MDGs and its commitment to continue collaborating with Member States, the United Nations system and other regional organizations in the pursuance of effective approaches to their achievement.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals.

Statement by the President

The President: I would like to begin by thanking all the 110 delegations — including many ministers — representing Member States and Permanent Observers, that have contributed to this important debate. Our focus on facts and substance demonstrates that we take very seriously the achievement of all the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, in all countries. It also demonstrates that, when dealing with substance, the Assembly is stronger and is able to send a strong message to the rest of the world.

Let me begin by highlighting some of the key conclusions that I will take away from our thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals.

First, it is clear that significant progress has been made, but that progress is uneven and too slow. We have the solutions. The key issue is that we all must deliver on our commitments, scale up our efforts and accelerate progress.

Second, Africa and the least developed countries need additional long-term assistance from the international community to catch up with the rest. In particular, there were strong calls for investment in agriculture — a critical source of income for the poorest of the poor — and infrastructure to achieve that.

Third, the MDGs are interdependent, and making progress on the poverty and hunger, education and health targets will have a catalytic effect on the other Goals.

Fourth, the international aid architecture is constrained by too much fragmentation, undermining the impact of aid. If our efforts are to be more effective, the international community needs to work together in closer partnership to reduce transition costs and increase predictability over the long term.

Fifth, partnerships with civil society and the private sector are essential in order to accelerate progress. The private sector should therefore be given the opportunity to provide goods and services to the poorest bottom billion, and large foundations should be encouraged to champion specific MDGs in order to produce concrete results.

Sixth, climate change is already undermining the achievement of the MDGs, particularly in the poorest countries and in those at greatest risk from its effects. Development must be environmentally responsible and sustainable.

Seventh, progress on the MDGS and economic growth can be greatly improved by closing the gender gap, empowering women and providing better access to maternal health care and basic health services, including reproductive health.

Eighth, trade is a potent tool in the fight against poverty. A timely and successful conclusion to the Doha Development Round has the potential to lift millions out of poverty. Preferential trade access for agricultural and value-added goods from Africa and the least developed countries would immediately boost the prospects for the MDGs as well as economic growth. For example, if the European Union and the United States removed cotton subsidies, cotton exports from Africa would increase by 75 per cent.

Ninth, rising food and energy prices are increasing food insecurity and malnutrition, a primary cause of infant mortality, stunted growth and other serious health risks.

Tenth, countries emerging from conflict urgently require better long-term support and improved modalities for delivering aid from the international community to reduce the likelihood that they will fall back into violence and instability.

Eleventh, better management of revenues — in particular from the recent commodity boom — including through the establishment of international guidelines, would increase domestic resources for development.

Twelfth, education is the foundation for lasting development. An additional investment of $10 billion in official development assistance is required to meet the Goal of providing basic education for all by 2010.

Thirteenth, investing in basic health care and services not only saves lives, but also is smart economics. According to a study by the United Nations Population Fund, every dollar invested in family planning can save up to $31 in Government spending on education, food, health, housing and water and sewage services. To achieve MDGs 4 and 5 by 2015, $5.5 billion is required.

Fourteenth, national ownership and policy space are vital requirements, enabling developing countries to follow their own development paths and to take full responsibility for their own development. Fundamental reform of the international architecture is necessary in order to give developing countries a greater voice and greater participation in the global policy and decision-making process.

Fifteenth, the MDG framework is the internationally accepted and intergovernmentally agreed benchmark for international development and

forms the basis of our global partnership. Any attempt to change the Goals without intergovernmental agreement would only serve to undermine their legitimacy.

If there is one point that has been made clearly and repeatedly, it is that delivering on our commitments is a priority and delivering results a necessity. Donors need to provide the additional aid and debt relief that they have promised. And developing countries need to integrate the Millennium Development Goals into national development plans and speed up the implementation of other commitments, including the commitment to achieve better governance.

Ekhard Deutscher, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, made it clear that donors are not on track to increase aid by $50 billion by 2010: that aid has fallen in real terms for the second consecutive year. "Money is not everything, but everything is nothing without money", he said. We also heard that only 17 per cent of the developing countries have operational strategies for integrating the MDGs into national development plans. The target that they set for themselves is 75 per cent by 2010.

Despite the many positive initiatives that many Member States have emphasized over the past few days, it is clear that progress on both sides of the partnership is lagging. Without concrete, results-focused MDG plans, donors naturally find it difficult to cut their own domestic spending in order to invest in developing countries: they need to demonstrate results to maintain public support. Without the confidence that donors will deliver extra resources, developing countries are not able to scale up programmes that deal with the MDGs. This appears to be a classic catch-22 situation, but really it is not. Fortunately, many donors, developing countries, multilateral organizations, private-sector entities and non-governmental organizations are already meeting one another halfway. That expresses the true spirit and meaning of MDG 8 — to forge a global partnership for development — and the values that the United Nations promotes and holds dear.

It is clear that more commitment and dedication are needed if we are to achieve the Goals on time. As one representative said, we have the knowledge, the technology and the wealth to make a difference for millions of people on our planet by helping to lift them out of grinding poverty. That is why I would like to commend Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation initiative, which is working with Lutheran and Methodist organizations to provide $200 million to fight malaria in Africa, and the Secretary-General's work to scale up implementation in Africa by identifying MDG financing gaps, in partnership with all stakeholders. Donors now have concrete investment opportunities to deliver on their promise to double aid to Africa by 2010.

It is also clear that the aid landscape is changing. The private sector now contributes approximately $14 billion in aid, with non-governmental organizations and civil society contributing approximately $12 billion. The role of the private sector will continue to grow, but it will not replace the role of Governments. Development does not happen without effective and accountable States that are capable of delivering services to their own citizens. We did, however, hear some very compelling arguments that the private sector should be given the opportunity to provide goods and services to the poorest bottom billion, and that private equity is prepared to work for a social dividend.

Charitable foundations are also playing a bigger role, by championing specific goals and by bringing in donors and developing countries to work on targeted initiatives. The MacArthur Foundation's work on MDG 5 — on maternal health — is an excellent example. More foundations should be encouraged to champion specific MDGs with respect to which they can add value and generate public support.

It is clear that, working together, we are stronger and that in partnership, we can make progress. When aid is effectively aligned behind national Governments and is predictable over the long term, progress can be achieved. Malawi recently doubled agricultural productivity in just one year. Ghana has introduced a successful national school nutrition programme. Since 2003, India has reduced the number of its children not attending school by almost 5 million per year. Honduras, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and many other countries have abolished fees for primary schools, dramatically increasing enrolment. Zambia has cancelled fees for basic and rural health services, and Burundi has introduced free medical care for mothers and children.

The General Assembly has a critical leadership role to play in mobilizing global support for the achievement of the MDGs. Many delegations endorsed my proposal that the Assembly meet each year until 2015 to take stock of global implementation and to hold all partners to account in keeping their MDG commitments.

The General Assembly established the historic Millennium Development Goals. It therefore has a responsibility to monitor their implementation and the commitments made by all parties to achieve their full implementation. In addition to holding an annual meeting devoted to that objective, the Assembly should mandate the United Nations Secretariat, working with all relevant funds, programmes and agencies, to submit an annual MDG global monitoring report, analysing implementation in all countries, to form the basis for our debate.

The Assembly has further opportunities to demonstrate its leadership role. Our meeting on 22 September 2008 focusing on Africa's specific development needs and the MDG event to be organized by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General on 25 September provide two additional opportunities to rally global support and announce concrete new initiatives.

Let this debate create an impulse that will resonate not only in New York, but around the world: 2008 must be a year of action.

The thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015" is now concluded. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 116.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.